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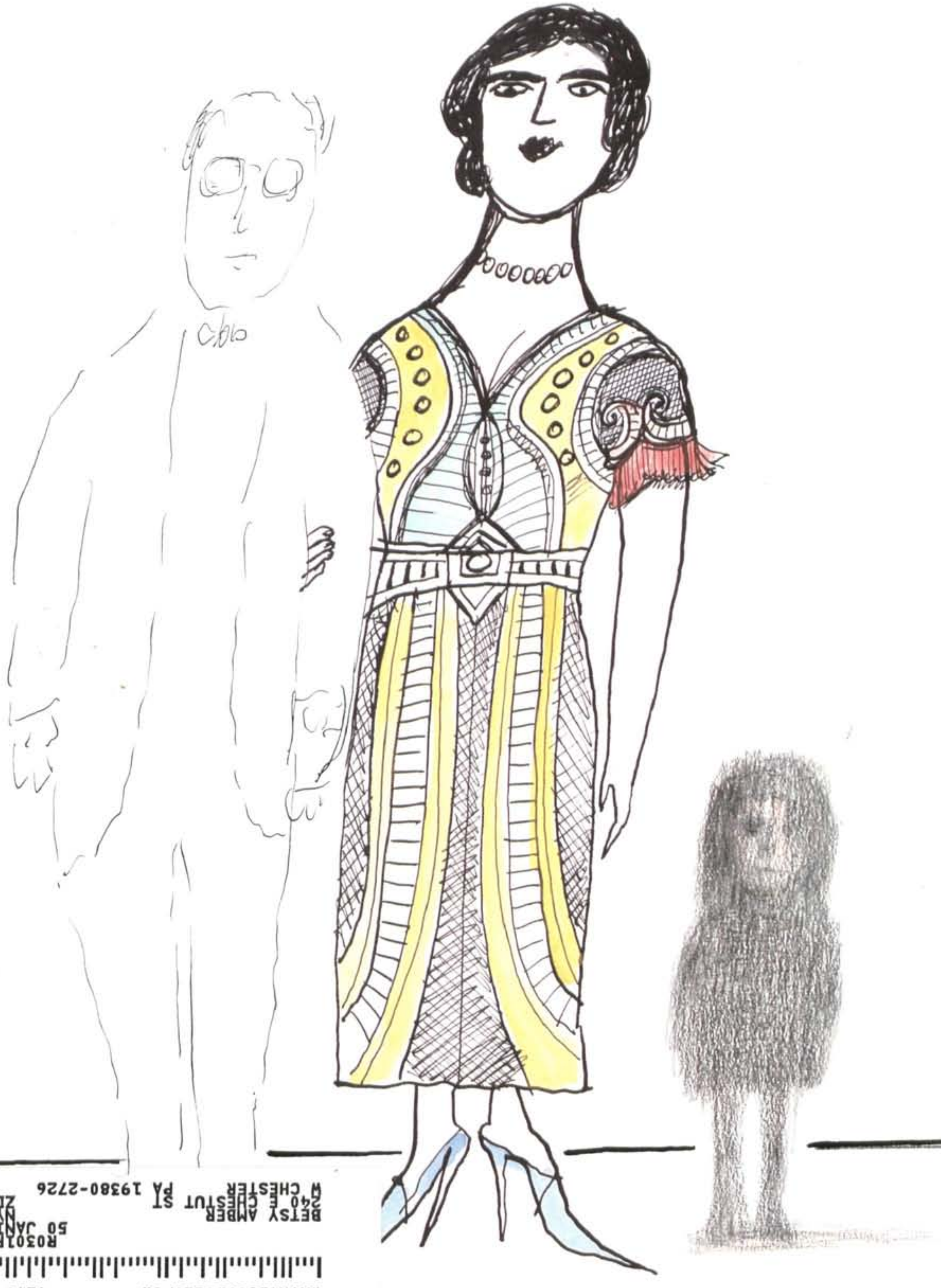
AUG. 18 & 25, 2003



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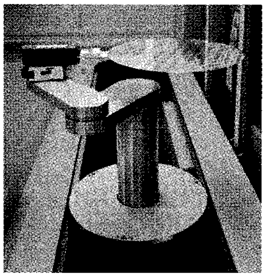
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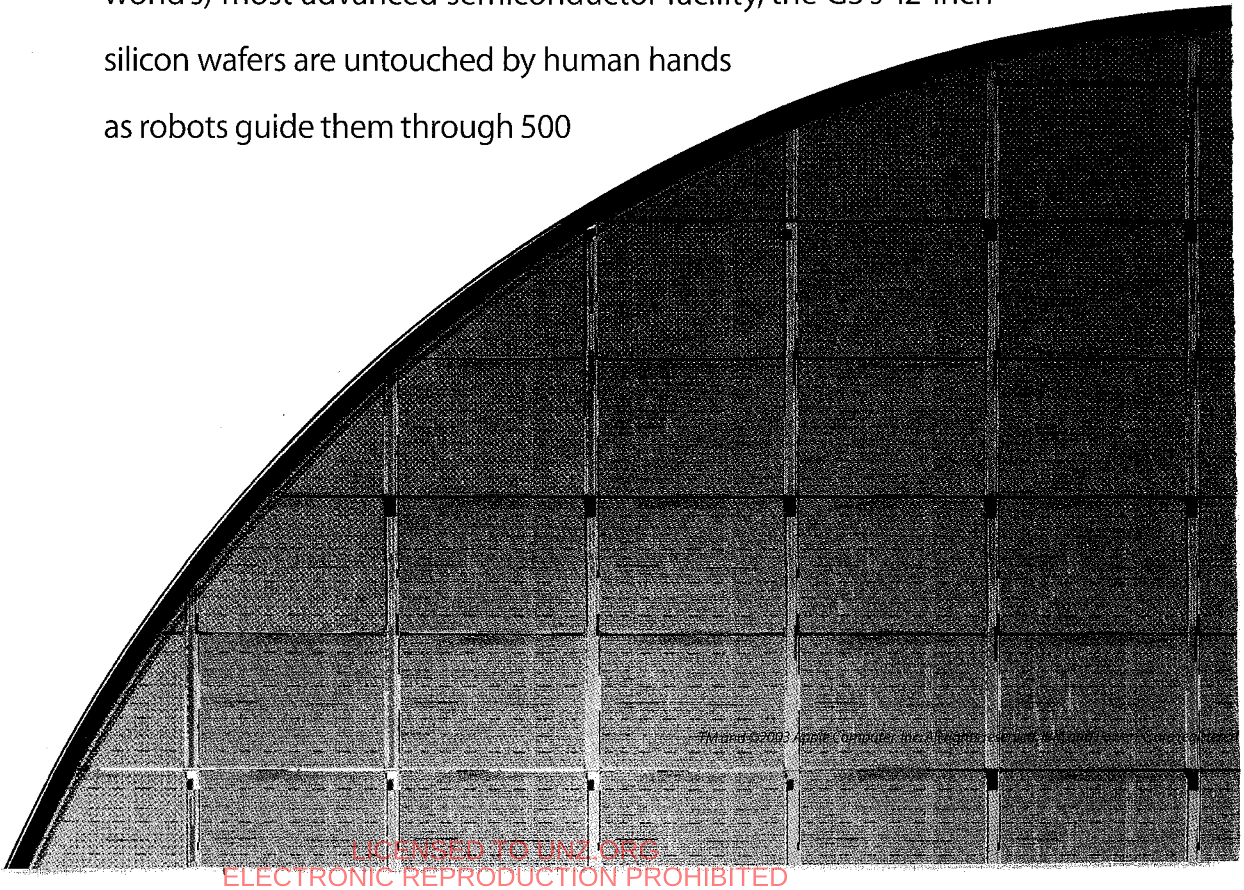

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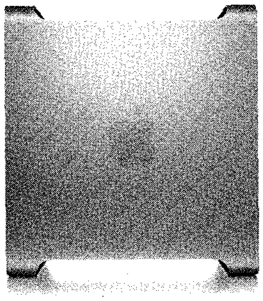

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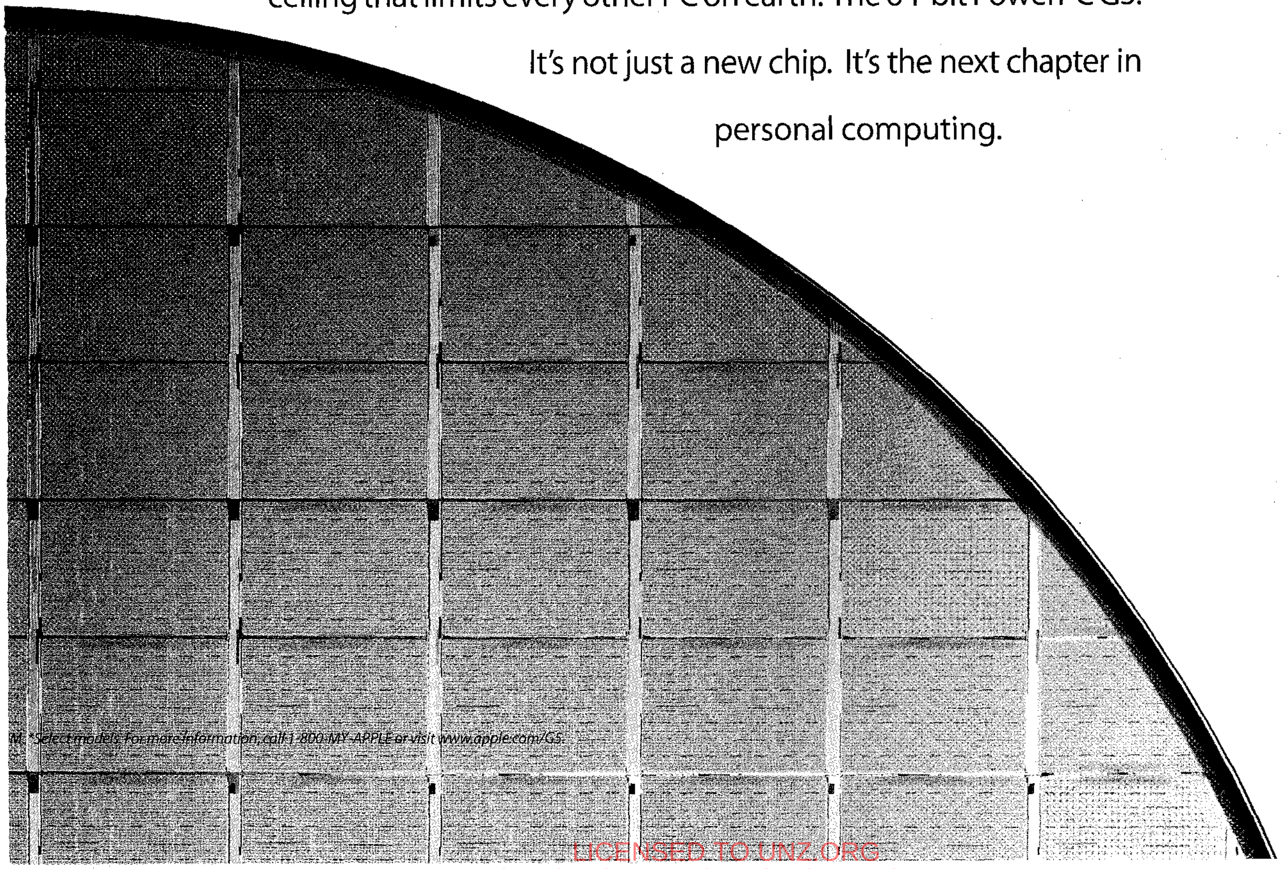

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the others describe him as a perplexing math **problem** that can never be solved. he goes his own way **with** little regret. **following** isn't in his blood. resisting **the** straight and narrow path is. he walks against the **crowd** that will soon follow. inspiration **is** the power **that** moves him ahead. **it's** always the brave soul who swims so proudly against the tide in the dull, **crowded** sea of sameness.

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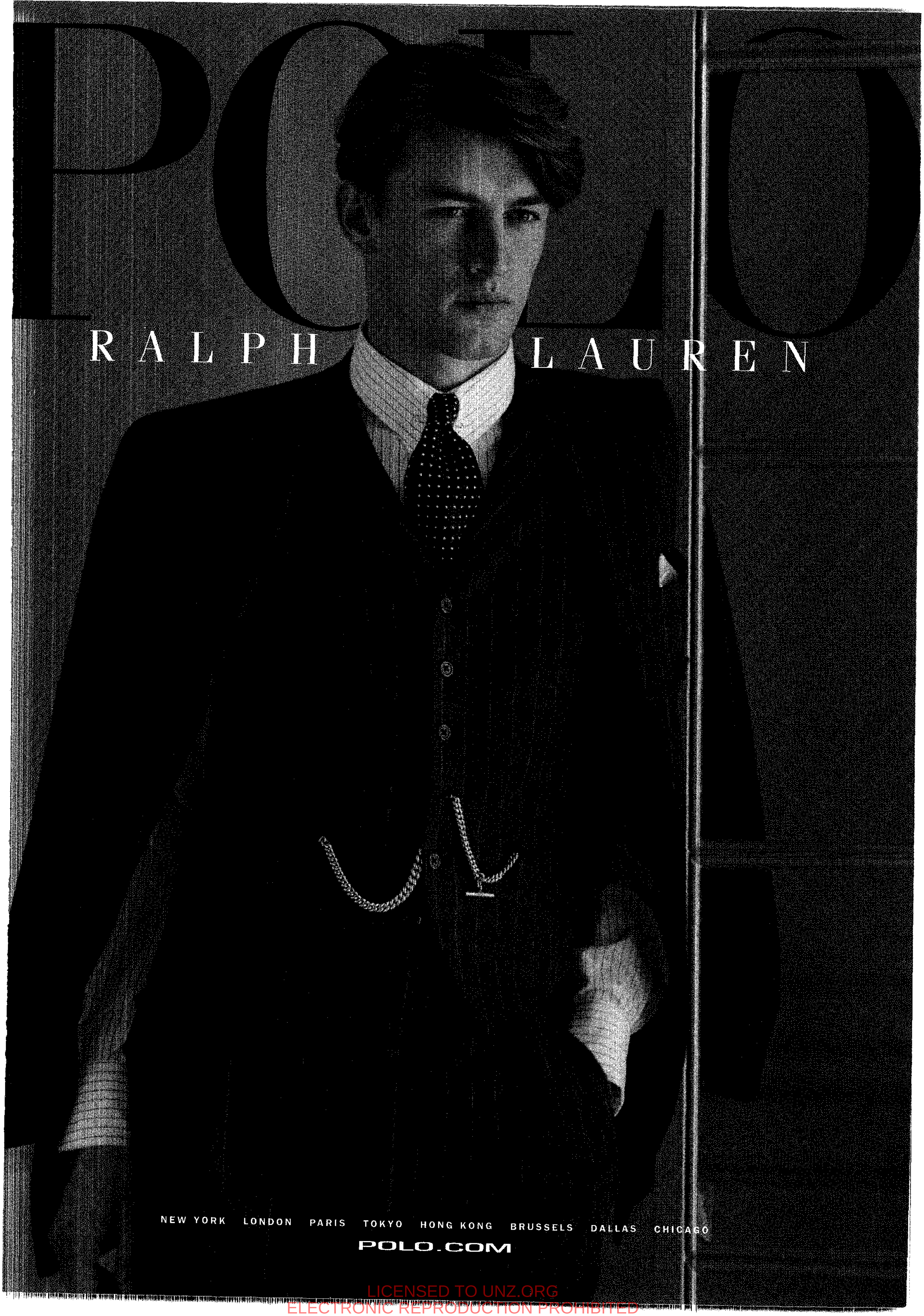
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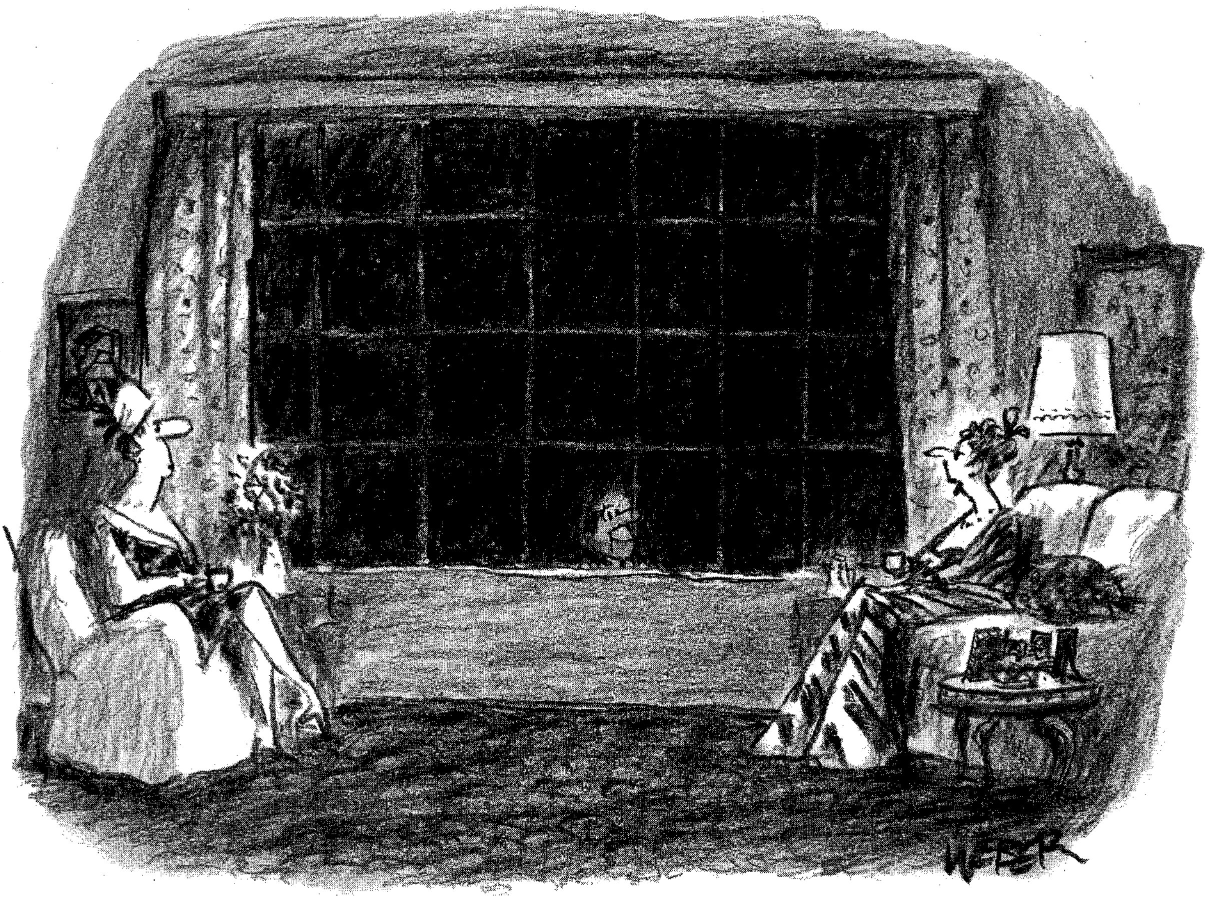

"That's Arthur, my first husband. I usually leave food out for him."

HOW DID YOU NOT

SEE IT COMING?

On June 7th, Justine Henin-Hardenne rewrote French history. First, by beating some of the toughest players in tennis, then by winning the French Open and truly becoming one of the biggest names in tennis. To understand the real magnitude of this moment, you have to go back to 1993 when she sat in the stands at Roland Garros and watched her idol go down in defeat. Already a young force in the game, she vowed to her mother that day that, if she ever made it here, she'd win. With a game that favors finesse over power and a *single-handed backhand* over a two-handed one, we say, congratulations, Justine, not only for winning, but more importantly, for keeping your word.

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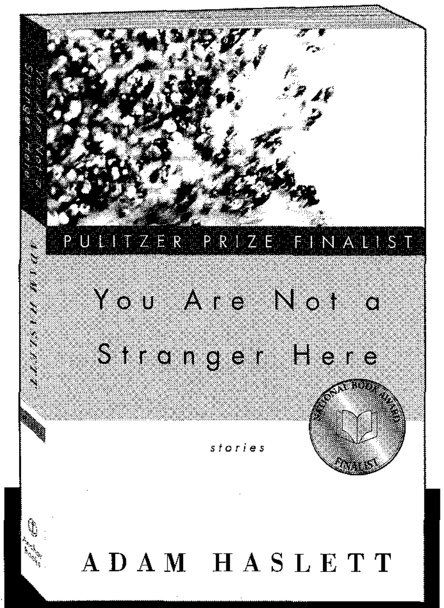

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Mary Ellen Mark (Portfolio, p. 121) has a new book of photographs, "Twins," coming out next month. There will be an exhibit at the Marianne Boesky Gallery, in New York, in October.

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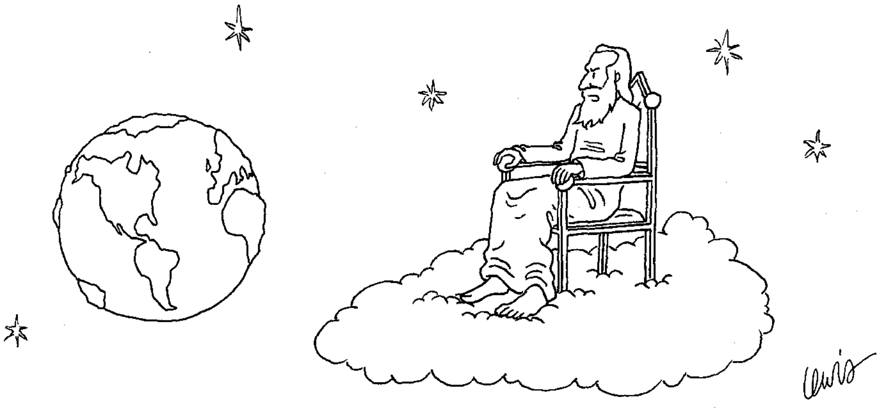
Hilton Als (Pop Music, p. 146), the author of "The Women," also writes about theatre for the magazine. ♦



"Don't make me come down there!"

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THE MAIL

BLIND VISIONS

In "The Mind's Eye," Oliver Sacks writes that many of those who become blind at an early age are believed to live, effectively, in a nonvisual world (July 28th). But, just as with people who become blind when they are adults, there is, as he notes, a good bit of variation in this trait. Even after I became blind, at the age of three, I retained vivid memories of colors. Moreover, in my scientific work with shells and other objects—I am a geologist—I have developed a very strong tactile imagery. Even when I am not actually touching an object, I can turn it around with my "mind's hand," and inspect it from all angles. This imagery is, I believe, instrumental in my empirical observational work, which depends heavily on comparisons. I also suspect that handling objects frequently is essential to honing this imagery. As a child in the hospital, before total blindness set in, I constantly played with the empty spools on which bandages had once been wrapped. Later, I was always encouraged by my parents to touch cutout letters and natural objects of every description. Many blind people may not have such experiences, and may, therefore, have lost the type of imagery—tactile or visual, whatever you wish to call it—that I have found to be so important to my life as a scientist.

Geerat J. Vermeij
Distinguished Professor of Geology
University of California
Davis, Calif.

LAWYERS AND INFORMERS

John Cassidy, in his Comment on corporate crime, points to the opposition to "proposals that would have forced law firms to report clients that persistently broke the law" as an example of the "rearguard action" of "corporate influence peddlers" (The Talk of the Town, August 4th). But those who oppose the idea of compelling lawyers to turn in their clients come from a broad ideological spectrum—and with good reason. Such a requirement would erode the right to "Assistance of Counsel" guaranteed by the Sixth Amendment. It would also have the opposite effect of what was presumably intended. Corporate officers and directors would be less likely to consult lawyers on the ethics and propriety of their actions. Lawyers, in turn, would be hard pressed to make a judgment about the point at which they were obligated to blow the whistle, lest they be deemed co-conspirators themselves.

Daniel E. Karson
Senior Counsel, Kroll, Inc.
New York City

EMERSON'S MUSIC

John Updike, in his article on Ralph Waldo Emerson's bicentennial, mentions several of Emerson's "disciples," Whitman and Thoreau among them (Books, August 4th). He omits, however, one of Emerson's most passionate followers: Charles Ives. "Emerson," the first and longest movement of Ives's great "Concord" sonata, is a vast, craggy, dense, soaring piece that Ives worked on for years and left in several different versions, thinking that for it to remain unfinished and open-ended was itself true to Emerson's questing spirit. In his "Essays Before a Sonata," Ives called Emerson "an invader of the unknown,—America's deepest explorer of the spiritual immensities . . . a recorder freely describing the inevitable struggle in the soul's uprise." Updike rightly questions whether Emersonian self-assertiveness "fits into today's crammed and touchy world," but perhaps that is just the problem: where in America today can we find a public figure such as Ives evoked, and one capable of that sort of inspiration?

David H. Porter
Visiting Professor of Liberal Arts
Williams College
Williamstown, Mass.

•

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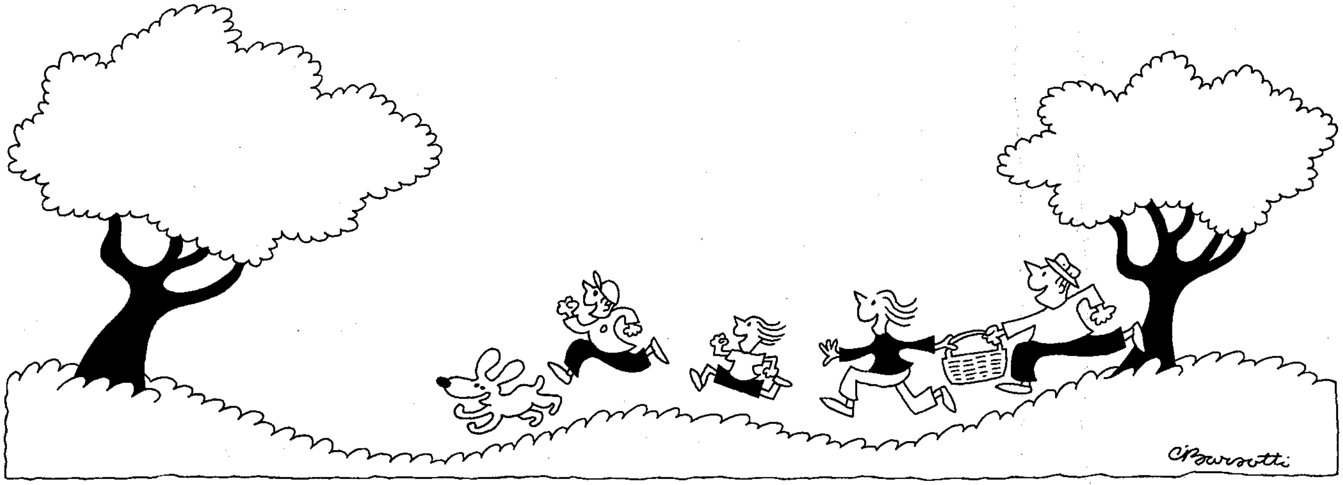

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

CARNIVAL KNOWLEDGE
The Coney Island impresario Todd Robbins brings a motley crew of sideshow icons to the SoHo Playhouse for an open-ended series of performances by the Human Blockhead, Twistina the Rubber Lady, the dwarf king Little Jimmy, the Flying Ebola Brothers, and other freaks and geeks. In previews. Opens Aug. 17 at 3. (15 Vandam St. 212-239-6200.)

DECEPTION
The Adobe Theatre closes the Ice Factory 2003 festival with a play written and directed by Jeremy Dobrish, based on a true story, about a man who becomes so entangled in the snarl of lies he has told his family that he decides that murder is the only way to extricate himself. Opens Aug. 13 at 7. Through Aug. 16. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 212-966-2844.)

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL
Two hundred and seven plays burn through twenty stages over seventeen days during the seventh annual celebration of downtown theatre, which runs through Aug. 24. Some highlights: " 'Buddy' Cianci: The Musical" (about the notorious Rhode Island politician) and Sean Cunningham's "Sherlock Holmes and the Secret of Making Whoopee II." (For schedule information, call 212-279-4488 or see www.fringenyc.org.)

PLAYING BURTON
The Irish Repertory Theatre presents a one-man show about the Welsh actor Richard Burton, written and directed by one of his countrymen, Mark Jenkins, and performed by the Burton look-alike Brian Mallon. Two previews on Aug. 13. Opens Aug. 14 at 8. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

THE THING ABOUT MEN
A new musical comedy based on Doris Dörrie's movie "Men" stars Marc Kudisch, Ron Bohmer, and Leah Hocking. Directed by Mark Clements, with staging by Rob Ashford. In previews. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AVENUE Q
This musical puppet-and-people show has much to recommend it: an exceptionally gifted cast, a strong book by Jeff Whitty, equally strong music and lyrics by Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx, and the splendid direction of Jason Moore. The remarkable Ann Harada stands out—a funny girl who can sing, act, and let the audience in on the joke all at the same time. Harada's character, Christmas Eve, a Japanese-born therapist who can't seem to book a client, lives on Avenue Q, in an unspecified New York City borough, with her fiancé, Brian (Jordan Gelber), an unemployed caterer who once harbored dreams of becoming a comedian on late-night TV. "But I'm thirty-two and as you can see / I'm not. Oh well. / It sucks to be me," he sings, in the show's opening number. Humans act alongside cloth co-stars—such as Princeton, a bright-eyed college grad, and two girls who want to date him, Kate Monster, a kindergarten teacher's aide, and a lounge singer called Lucy T. Slut (both performed by the great Stephanie D'Abruzzo). Is it possible to be attracted to a puppet? D'Abruzzo gives Lucy so much verve that when she saunters offstage in D'Abruzzo's hand—all the puppets are handheld—you want to follow her with wolf whistles. (Reviewed in our issue of 8/11/03.) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

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17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26				

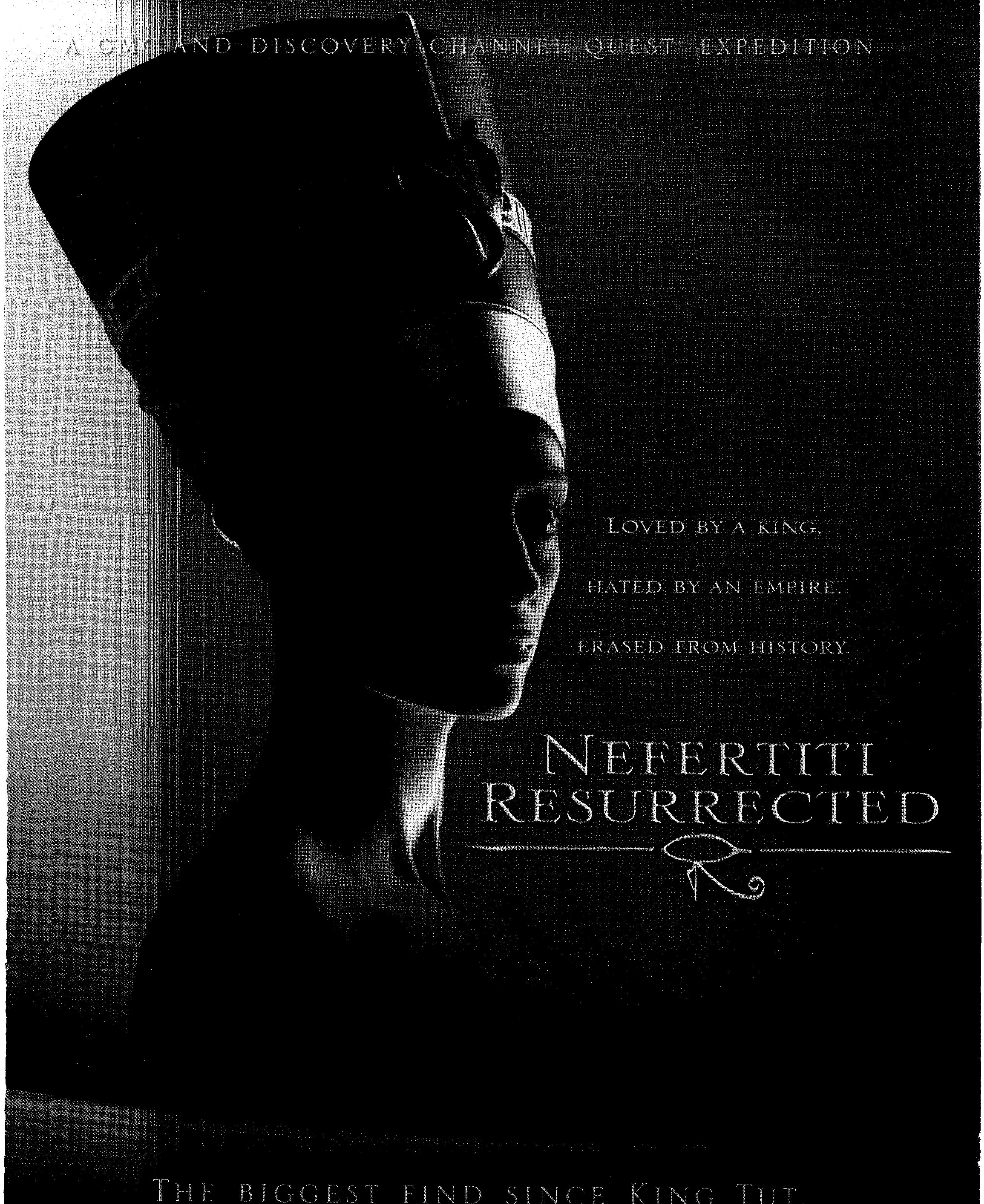
BIG RIVER
In this lively, ingeniously staged production, which features deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing actors, the American Sign Language adaptation of the classic musical gets its New York début. The play, based on Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn," has a witty book by William Hauptman and a rousing score and lyrics by Roger Miller, and the big musical numbers don't detract from the subtlety of Twain's exposition; instead, the songs and performances boost Twain's vibrant language and wild leaps of humor. As Huck Finn, Tyrone Giordano (who is deaf) excellently conveys Huck's emotions and thoughts without speaking a line, aided by his expressive, Chaplinesque face. As he performs, the gifted Daniel Jenkins accompanies him, speaking Huck's lines. Michael McElroy, as Jim, the escaped slave whom Huck befriends, has a baritone that rocks the rafters. A co-production of the Deaf West and Roundabout theatre companies. Directed by Jeff Calhoun. (American Airlines, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

THE CAPITOL STEPS
The satirical Washington, D.C.-based musical group brings its newest show, "Between Iraq and a Hard Place," to the John Houseman Theatre. (450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Closes Aug. 31.)

EDGE
In Sylvia Plath's most famous poem, "Daddy," she memorialized her father, Otto, writing, "Every woman adores a Fascist, / The boot in the face, the brute / Brute heart of a brute like you." When she met and married the English poet Ted Hughes, she found Daddy all over again, the poem implies; and when she committed suicide at the age of thirty, the two men were left notionally guilty by association. This is the emotional trajectory Plath's fans trace when they think of her, and Paul Alexander, the author of two books about Plath, is no exception. In the one-woman monologue "Edge," which he directs and which he derived from his biography "Rough Magic," he has an agenda: he uses the facts of Plath's life to prove that Otto and Ted made her do it. Still, in a troubling and powerful performance, Angelica Torn makes us see what the script does not—the extent to which Plath, who believed that she didn't exist unless she was being subjugated by a man, manufactured her own downfall. (8/11/03) (DR2 Theatre, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT
In a stately and compelling production at the Plymouth, Eugene O'Neill's masterpiece has been superbly revived, bringing O'Neill's own spectral, heartbroken family—"the four haunted Tyrones," he called them—to the stage. Vanessa Redgrave and Brian Dennehy play Mary and James Tyrone, and Philip Seymour Hoffman and Robert Sean Leonard are their sons, Jamie and Edmund. Redgrave, lyrical and feral, moves like a trapped animal in a cage of her own choosing. And Hoffman's toxic sorrow in his fight with his brother kicks the play onto a completely new emotional level. Directed by Robert Falls. (5/19/03) (236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Closes Aug. 31.)

LOST
Hansel and Gretel are Hanlon and Gabby in this dysfunctional-family fairy tale about a geeky boy (the excellent Ted Malawer) and his precocious sister (the adorable April Vidal) who are enticed into the woods by a mad scientist whose crazed wife, Mamba, wants to harvest their organs. The husband, Laborius, is played with exultant Tim Curryesque excess by John Schumacher, while Molly Karlin nails Mamba, a manipulative "hippie, baroque, Motown" mama who habitually tricks children into believing, through fear and medical experiments, that they need her. The couple, the siblings, and a cast of lost souls (which includes hoodoo puppets) communicate in sung verse, producing an inventive, macabre drama that makes perfect Fringe Festival fare. With a script by Kirk Wood Bromley and a precise, sparkling score by the late Jessica Grace Wing. Rob Urbinati directs. (Linhart Theater, 440 Lafayette St. 212-279-4488. Closes Aug. 23.)



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Des Keogh stars in a poignant quasi-comedy about a bachelor farmer's efforts to find himself a wife, which he adapted from the stories of the Irish writer John B. Keane. Directed by Charlotte Moore. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

MATT & BEN
This is one not to miss. In addition to being short—just over an hour—it's goofy, funny, and improbably believable. In captivating performances, Mindy Kaling (a compact, Indian-American woman in a tracksuit) and Brenda Withers (a lanky Wasp in khakis and a rumpled button-down) play Ben (Affleck) and Matt (Damon), best friends from the Cambridge Rindge & Latin School, who are holed up in 1997 in a filthy apartment, squabbling as they try to write a script. When the complete screenplay to "Good Will Hunting" literally drops from the ceiling, they are both floored, and their friendship is tested. The gag is that Ben is a complete fool but a good guy with horse sense, while Matt is arrogant but talented; what keeps it from getting tired is that the actresses (who wrote the script) make the bond between the two guys seem real, in spite of their differences. Kaling and Withers have created one of the most appealing male-bonding stories since Damon and Pythias, or Oscar and Felix. And within minutes you don't even notice that they're not males. Directed by David Warren. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-477-5288.)

The Libertines, or at least most of them, take Irving Plaza on August 15 (see Night Life).

JOHN RITTER

MISS JULIE
Strindberg's play about an uptown girl who has an affair with her father's valet is presented by Blush Productions in a new adaptation by Julie Saad. Directed by Daniel Cohen. (Common Basis Theatre, 750 Eighth Ave., between 46th and 47th Sts. 212-868-4444.)

THE SUMMER OF THE SWANS
Julia Jordan's mood-perfect adaptation of Betsy Byars's book about a thirteen-year-old girl who struggles with adolescent awkwardness, a too-pretty older sister, and a disabled, mute brother is one of the most grownup plays in town. On a marvellously expressive set by James Wolk, ceiling-height *Seventeen*-magazine covers from the seventies form a backdrop that unfolds into a suburban lawn, a TV room, or a sun-dappled wood, where Sara (Kate Wetherhead) stews at the unfairness of life, cossets and chivvies her brother, watches swans take flight, and almost has her first kiss. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. Tickets are free, and are first come, first served. For information, call 212-642-6754. Closes Aug. 20.)

THE WOOD DEMON
Chekhov's play gets a new translation by Carol Rocamora in the Desert Apple Theatre Company production, directed by Cynthia Dillon. (Chernuchin Theatre, American Theatre of Actors, 314 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444. Closes Aug. 23.)

OUT OF TOWN

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA
When you see a play outdoors, nature sometimes heightens the drama, as happened recently under the tent at Boscobel. When Enobarbus (eloquently played by Stephen Paul Johnson), observed that his friend Mark Antony (Kurt Rhoads) had got his courage back, and declared, "Now he'll outstare the lightning," a thunderclap underscored the speech, and light flashed over the Hudson River and its flanking hills. But even in clement weather, the tempestuous Cleopatra (Nance Williamson) assures a fiery evening. The production closes the seventeenth annual Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival. Directed by David Muse. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575. Closes Aug. 31.)

KING LEAR
Jonathan Epstein plays the title role in the Shakespeare & Company production of the tragedy in the Berkshires, which runs in repertory with "Much Ado About Nothing" and "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)." (Founders' Theatre, Lenox, Mass. For information, call 413-637-3353 or see www.shakespeare.org. Closes Aug. 30.)

TAMING OF THE SHREW: EXTREME
This is better theatre than you'd expect to find on a hill by a footbridge in a park at the easternmost tip of Long Island—silly but savvy, and just the thing to accompany a sunset picnic. The mischievous creators have mimicked the construction of "Kiss Me, Kate," alternating layers of Shakespeare's romp with a modern-day battle of the sexes (Kate and Petruchio square off in Everlast boxing gloves) patterned after "Survivor," with challenges, buzzers, a scoreboard, and faux-earnest testimonials. As night falls, junebugs and actors zoom madly across the stage and its grassy perimeter, giddy with purposeful energy. Directed by Craig George. (Theodore Roosevelt County Park, Route 27, three miles east of Montauk. For information, call 631-267-0105 or see www.hamptons-shakespeare.org. Through Aug. 15 in Montauk. Aug. 20-24 in Agawam Park, Southampton.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 212-254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.

CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 212-239-6200.

DREAM A LITTLE DREAM
Village, 158 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100. (Closes Aug. 31.)

ENCHANTED APRIL
Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Aug. 31.)

FLESH AND BLOOD
New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Aug. 24.)

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.

42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

GYPSY
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

HAIRSPRAY
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.

KIKI AND HERB: COUP DE THÉÂTRE
Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St., between Bedford and Hudson Sts. 212-239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

MAN OF LA MANCHA
Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Aug. 31.)

MOVIN' OUT
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.

NINE
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

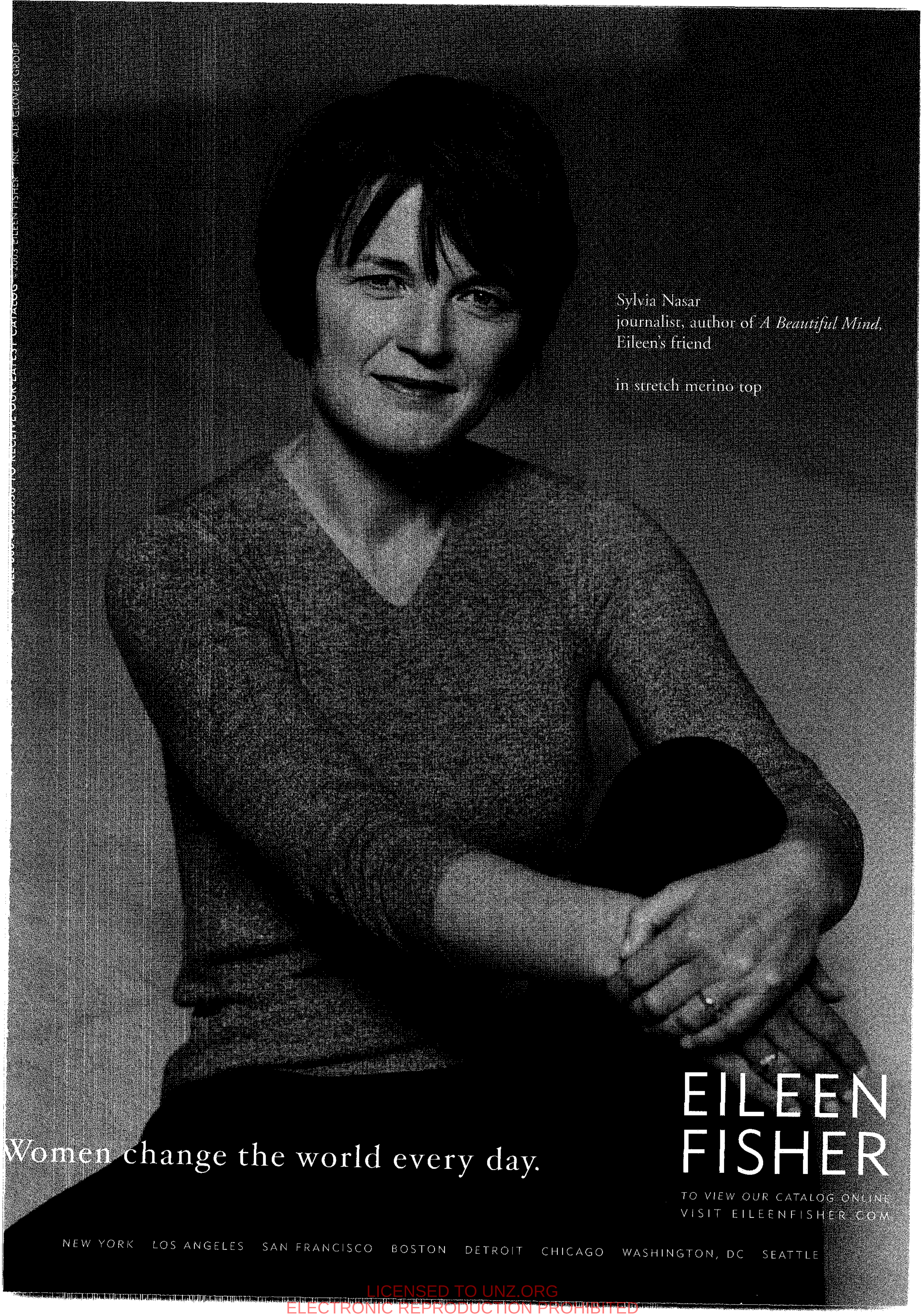
THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-921-8000.

SAY GOODNIGHT, GRACIE
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Aug. 24.)

STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 212-477-2477.

TAKE ME OUT
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.



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TALKING HEADS
Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 212-307-1400.

THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.

URINETOWN
Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

DANCE

LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS
The free dance performances on the plein-air plazas of Lincoln Center continue. In the Damrosch Band Shell, Paul Taylor Dance performs on Aug. 13 at 8, and on Aug. 15 at 8 the tutued men of Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo present their signature drag ballets. At once sendup and tribute, these satiric pastiches exhibit a wicked accuracy that only true ballet lovers could create. On Aug. 19 at 8, the young dancers of Ailey II, whose disciplined power belies their J.V. status, present Troy Powell's "The Tyner Project" and Robert Battle's exhausting and exhilarating "The Hunt." On Aug. 20 at 8, three troupes from Philly—Moxie Dance Collective, Phrenic New Ballet, and Myra Bazell—show their stuff. Nearby, in the Josie Robertson Plaza, the fevered and sometimes overbusy Kevin Wynn Collection presents excerpts from "Ruptured Angel on the Asphalt" and other works, on Aug. 19 at 6. And on the North Plaza, on Aug. 21 at 8:30, the Han-Tang Yuefu Ensemble completes the dance portion of the festival with an evening of Taiwanese music and dance. (212-875-5766.)

SMUIN BALLET
Michael Smuin, a San Francisco-based choreographer known for crossing ballet with Broadway, presents "Dancin' with Gershwin," a concert that matches the music of Fred Astaire, Ella Fitzgerald, Al Jolson, Sting, and Cher with the mélange of dance idioms Smuin samples (tap, adagio), though not always directly. With "Stabat Mater," set to Dvořák. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Aug. 13 and Aug. 16 at 2 and 8 and Aug. 14-15 at 8.)

BATTERY DANCE COMPANY AND FRIENDS
An outdoor downtown dance festival comes to Battery Park, featuring Jonathan Hollander's Battery Dance Company, Swapnasundari & Ensemble, Zig Zag Ballet, the Amy Marshall Dance Company, and other groups, on Saturday the 16th. Battery Dance Company performs solo on the following Wednesday, in Union Square. (212-219-3910. No tickets necessary. Aug. 16 at 1:30, with a rain date of Aug. 17; and Aug. 20 at 6.)

"BOOTED"
Dancers in sequinned ball gowns and combat boots perform swirling duels in a flamenco-influenced evening created by Eva Dean Dance. Pieces include "Moon Garden," "Away from One's Front," and "Welcome Back." Part of the New York International Fringe Festival. (Washington Square United Methodist Church, 135 W. 4th St. 212-279-4488. Aug. 14 at 8, Aug. 16 at 2:15, and Aug. 20 at 3.)

CLEO PARKER ROBINSON DANCE ENSEMBLE
Robinson and her eponymous company, school, and theatre have been a force in the Denver dance community for decades, and her group has toured internationally for more than twenty years. But this month marks her first full New York season and her Joyce début. The integrated ensemble displays a generous, robust version of modern dance in the African-American tradition. In "Raindance" (1984), the company's signature work, by Milton Myers, hieratic poses and harvesting motions take on timeless lyricism, undercut by Jean-Michel Jarré's dated synthesizer score. The program also includes "One Nation Under a Groove, Part 2," inspired by the 1963 Birmingham church bombing, and "Divinities," a première by Carlos Dos Santos, Jr. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Aug. 18-22 at 8 and Aug. 23 at 2 and 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY / HUBBARD STREET DANCE CHICAGO
The last two weeks of the Jacob's Pillow summer festival feature a potent mix of homegrown and international modern dance. On Aug. 13, on the main stage, Stephen Petronio's proficient, dedicated-to-the-point-of-masochism dancers begin their season, bringing glossy pop polish to the Pillow's easeful lawns. "Strange Attractors Part II" displays Petronio's customary breakneck dynamic, and several newer pieces contain extra glam factors. "City of Twist," an ode to New Yorkers after 9/11, has ethereal music by Laurie Anderson and vintage costumes by the fashion designer Tara Subkoff (of Imitation of Christ) and is made up of solos that allude to resurrection. And a sneak peek from "The Island of Misfit Toys," which has its début in London this fall, features a subterranean score by Lou Reed. On the 20th, Jim Vincent's Hubbard Street Dance Chicago closes the festival with its popular jazz numbers and conceptual pieces concocted by Nacho Duato and Ohad Naharin. (Ted Shawn Theatre, Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. Aug. 13-15 and Aug. 20-22 at 8, Aug. 16 and Aug. 23 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 17 and Aug. 24 at 2.)

AKRAM KHAN DANCE COMPANY / COMPAGNIE FELIX RUCKERT
Two back-to-back weeks of premières by European choreographers play at the Doris Duke Studio Theatre. In the first week, Khan and his powerful, sleek dancers perform "Kaash," a mystical, driving dance that translates Northern Indian solo kathak dance into contemporary movement, leaving behind ankle bells and references to the gods and taking on a spatial structure that makes group dance feasible. The dance has rhythmic quick stamps, whipped turns, and sharp, photo-ready mise-en-scènes and is set to a pounding electronic Indian score by Nitin Sawhney. Anish Kapoor's backdrop, a severe black rectangle against a stark field that changes from white to glowing red, serves as a meditative presence, both oppressive and impressive. In the final week, the Bausch disciple Felix Ruckert and his Berlin-based dance group present the première "Deluxe Joy Pilot," in which they conjure a night-club setting and enlist the audience to join them in hedonistic games. Spectators can recline among the dancers on soft platforms or inflatable seats and participate in experiments with social boundaries. The result is more of a kinesthetic orgy than a composed dance; timid viewers may choose to hang back on the outskirts, but the only real risk in taking a seat onstage may be falling for one of the dexterous, bewitching dancers. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. Aug. 14-15 and Aug. 21-22 at 8:15, Aug. 16 and Aug. 23 at 2:15 and 8:15, and Aug. 17 and Aug. 24 at 5.)

NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Aug. 14 at 6:30: The Georgia folk duo **Indigo Girls** offer a benefit concert. With the bilingual lyrics and slide guitar of **Cordero.** Aug. 16 at 3: The **Polyphonic Spree.** Led by the former Tripping Daisy singer Tim DeLaughter, this twenty-plus-member outfit from Austin, Texas, favors relentlessly positive harmonizing and long white robes. Aug. 17 at 3: One of the most successful dance bands to emerge during the early years of Guinea's independence, **Bembeya Jazz** started reworking traditional rhythms with Western horns and guitars back in 1961. Following the death of the band's creative director, Acoubacar Dembar Camara, in 1973, and Guinea's declining economic fortunes during the eighties, the band dissolved a little more than a decade ago. But under the leadership of the guitarist Sekou (Diamond Fingers) Diabaté, the Afro-pop ambassadors recently reunited for their first record in fourteen years. With **Randy Weston's African Rhythms.** Aug. 20 at 6:30: Another benefit concert, this one a double bill with **Aimee Mann** and **Ben Folds.** (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 212-360-2777.)

LIVE FROM HOME
Prone to self-satisfied smirking and bouts of rampant hedonism, Oregon's **Dandy Warhols** never seemed to quite live up to their oh-so-cool image, morphing from a droning dream-pop band into novelty songsmiths thanks to "Not If You Were the Last Junkie on Earth" and "Bohemian Like You." Roping in the foppish Duran Duran keyboardist, Nick Rhodes, to produce their latest album, "Welcome to the Monkey House," they try their hand at neo-New Wave. With the precocious folkie **Kieran McGee.** (Housing Works Used Book Café, 126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324. Aug. 15 at 7:30.)

GUSTER
This quirky Boston-based pop trio built its fan base through what you might call nouveau-grassroots methods: relentless touring and a hefty Internet presence. (Want to know what's playing on Guster's iPods? Or the status of the lead singer's mustache? Guster.com has all that and more.) The question now becomes: can the marketing muscle of Reprise records, which is solidly behind the band's latest

"Lost," a musical update of "Hansel and Gretel," is one of more than two hundred plays in the seventeenth annual New York International Fringe Festival, which runs through August 24.

YUKO SHIMIZU

album, "Keep It Together," bring the Guster gospel to new ears? (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-307-7171. Aug. 16 at 8.)

311
Alongside such heavier hitters as the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Faith No More, this less celebrated Nebraskan ensemble can be held accountable for the spread of today's inescapable rap-rock/nü-metal phenomenon. The versatile group's penchant for hippie-ish jamming might have undermined their credibility with that scene's large-trousered devotees, but the endearing underdogs keep at it. They're here in support of their latest disk, "Evolver." (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 212-307-7171. Aug. 18-19 at 7:30.)

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Belle & Sebastian. A member of this shy pop ensemble from Glasgow once said, "If we have to choose between doing a gig in London and playing in front of our friends, we'll go for the friends every time," so we should consider ourselves lucky that they've made it all the way to Brooklyn. A benefit concert. (Prospect Park Bandshell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. 718-855-7882, ext. 45. Aug. 19 at 7.)

SEX PISTOLS
The fabled prototypes of punk rock abandon their remaining principles as they mount a second reunion tour. Their transformation from anarchic iconoclasts into embalmed oldies act is complete, and now the late Sid Vicious really has something to sneer at from beyond the grave. (Jones Beach Theatre. 212-307-7171. Aug. 21 at 7:30.)

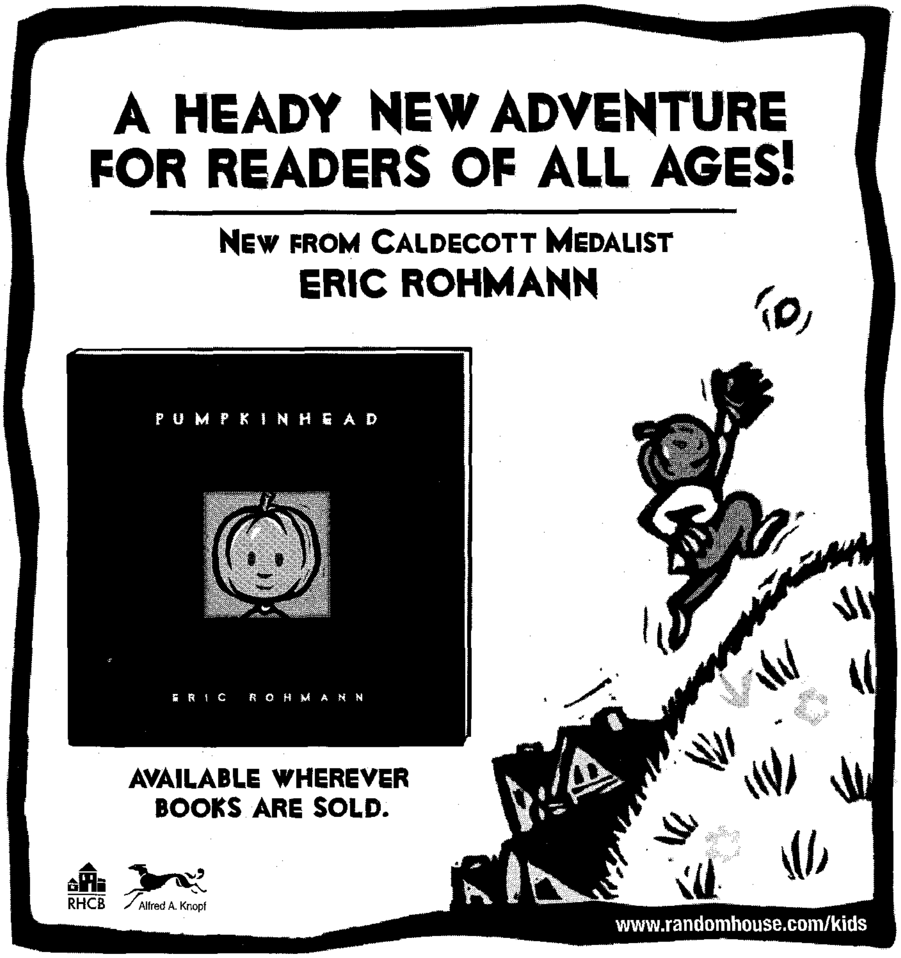
BJÖRK
With a strikingly emotive voice seemingly pilfered from an archangel, the elfin Icelander has ascended from her humble beginnings as lead singer for the quirky Sugarcubes into a genuine pop icon. She may have the status of her fellow single-monikered peers (Sting, Cher, Madonna, etc.), but her uniquely eccentric charm and un-divalike behavior keep her close to our hearts. With the cryptic and epic stylings of her countrymen in **Sigur Rós** and **Bonnie Prince Billy,** the lyrically obscure, completely sincere performer also known as Will Oldham. (Keyspan Park, 1904 Surf Ave., Coney Island, Brooklyn. 212-307-7171. Aug. 22-23 at 7.)

CHARLIE PARKER JAZZ FESTIVAL
Written off for dead not so long ago, this gathering is back, thanks to the efforts of the City Parks Foundation, a nonprofit group. Once more, uptown and downtown get their share of premium bebop. The Harlem show features Carla Cook, Wessell Anderson, the Three Altos, and the legendary drummer Roy Haynes. (Marcus Garvey Park, Fifth Ave. at 112th St. Aug. 23 at 3.) The following day, Lonnie Plaxico, Jeff (Tain) Watts, and two superb altosax stylists—Arthur Blythe and Charles McPherson—play the East Village. (Tompkins Square Park, St. Marks Pl. at Avenue A. Aug. 24 at 3. For more information, call 212-260-8290.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Aug. 18-19: The so-called Icelandic Invasion, led by the Sugarcubes, Björk, and Sigur Rós, is less akin to a band of marauding Vikings than it is to the majestic melting of the polar ice caps—the soundscapes are big and ethereal, the pace glacial but powerful. Reykjavik's **Múm** continues that tradition with its synthy late-night lullabies. On their U.S. tour the laptop-chamber-pop group will share the stage with several instrumentalists who provide the horns, strings, and other sounds that fill out the clicks and pops of their latest album, 2002's "Finally We Are No One." Aug. 25: Fans of the **New Pornographers'** albums, "Electric Version" and "Mass Romantic," might be disappointed in the Canadian group's live performance. Onstage, the band members seem a bit bewildered, the harmonies slightly off, the melodies painfully twee. That is, until Neko Case stops



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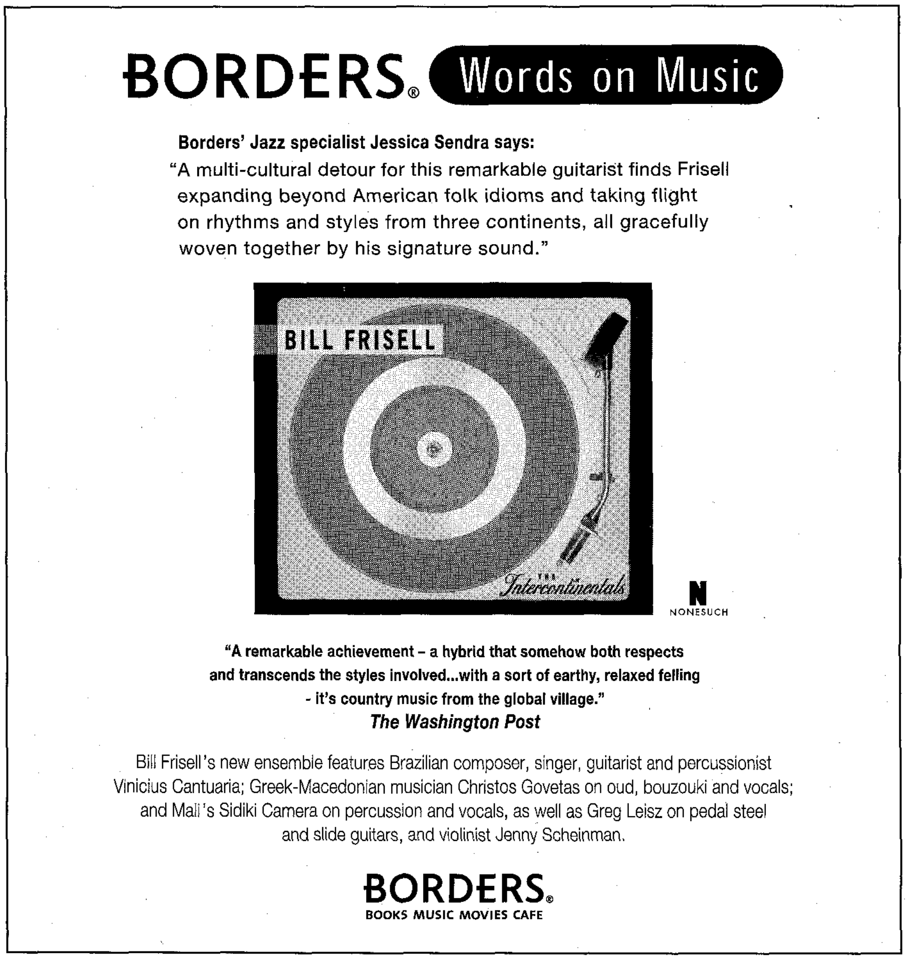

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"A remarkable achievement – a hybrid that somehow both respects and transcends the styles involved...with a sort of earthy, relaxed felling - it's country music from the global village."
The Washington Post

Bill Frisell's new ensemble features Brazilian composer, singer, guitarist and percussionist Vinicius Cantuaria; Greek-Macedonian musician Christos Govetas on oud, bouzouki and vocals; and Mali's Sidiki Camera on percussion and vocals, as well as Greg Leisz on pedal steel and slide guitars, and violinist Jenny Scheinman.

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staring at her feet and wrests control of the microphone. Suddenly the Pornographers' most brilliant decision—casting the alt-country siren as a pop vocalist—becomes clear. When Case hits the upper regions of her register, she transforms preciousness into pop perfection.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (212-533-7000)—Aug. 15: **Greta Gertler,** an Australian expat who now lives in Brooklyn, has a spacious voice and a welcome weakness for lushly orchestrated seventies-era singer-songwriter pop. Aug. 20: The **Handsome Family** traffics in eerie gothic country, and their live shows are full of intimate banter between the husband and wife Brett and Rennie Sparks. The pair recorded their latest album, "Singing Bones," in the garage of their New Mexico home, and you can practically hear the desert wind blowing through the walking bass and the guitar picking. Wednesdays in August, the acerbic comedian **Joan Rivers** calls this downtown *boîte* home. The following night, the **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Aug. 15: The **Libertines** are swaggering Brit rockers of the old school, the kind whose pre-show ritual is to get falling-down drunk. In the past the band has cancelled shows, reportedly because its members were too intoxicated to play. The ego battles between the singer-guitarist Peter Doherty and the singer Carl Barat have been a characteristic element of the band's performances: the tension fuels their aura of cocky punk belligerence (and fills the U.K. music tabs). Doherty, who is "unwell," according to the band's official statement, has been sidelined for this tour (the British press has been reporting his arrest for burglary).

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Aug. 15: The multitalented country performer **Tift Merritt** (songwriter, singer, and guitarist) turned out one of the best albums of last year. Her solo début, "Bramble Rose," is a cross-country-road-trip-worthy collection of poignant vignettes and wistful vocalizing.

SIN-É
150 Attorney St. (212-388-0077)—Aug. 20: **Jarboe,** a Georgia native, who sang with New York's legendary nihilists Swans for more than a decade, makes her first solo appearance in town in three years. Jarboe's voice is eerie and stirring; touches of gospel and old-time country music mix with anguished rock histrionics not unlike those of the German singer Dagmar Krause (her childhood included snake-handling rituals). But Jarboe is more than just a spine-tingling chanteuse; she's an uncanny performer. At her last New York City appearance she captivated a staid C.M.J. crowd; in an S & M-tinged moment she approached a middle-aged man and wrapped her hands around his throat, pulled him out of his chair, and began slow dancing with him. Like everyone else in the room, he couldn't take his eyes off her. With her Italian backing band, **Larsen,** and the Brooklyn-based, Eastern Euro-centric ensemble **Barbez.** Aug. 25: The endearing D.C.-based instrumental duo **Cigarbox Planetarium** stops by with its self-described "mood-musical cocktail-twang bossatiki surfanova spaghettiwesternish outer-spy soundtrackesque instrumental lounge." Hammond organ, a Casio keyboard, and a Ventures-like guitar combine for delightful fifties-and-sixties-tinged soundtrack stylings (a touch Níno Rota, a touch Henry Mancini). Be sure to order a Martini.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Aug. 13: Conspiracy-minded Jewish hip-hoppers **Non-Phixion,** whose lyrics and gritty beats make erudite references to everything from bin Laden's C.I.A. alliance to Pete Seeger's HUAC testimony. After four years in major-label limbo, their full-length début came out in 2002 on their own Uncle Howie label. With their fragmented, string-driven beats (and the help of the hip-hop luminaries DJ Premier and Pete Rock), Non-Phixion finally articulated the choppy, apocalyptic feel of their early sides into a single, cohesive statement. Fans should expect a show that owes as much to the History Channel as it does to Wu-Tang Clan.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Aug. 14: The Canadian alt-country quintet **Luther Wright and the Wrongs,** who made a splash last year with their inspired cover of Pink Floyd's "The Wall," return with a show of down-home originals. Aug. 18: The Manchester quartet **Brassy,** led by an American (Jon Spencer's sister Muffin), mixes hip-hop and punk rock. Aug. 22-23: The double-guitar strains of **Luna.**

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—Aug. 15: The **Polyphonic Spree** (see Concerts—Central Park SummerStage).

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BARBÉS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Aug. 17: The violinist and composer **Jenny Scheinman** performs the calypsos of the legendary composer Lionel Belasco, with the help of the guitarist **Matt Munisteri** and the accordionist **Will Holshouser.** Aug. 21: Munisteri returns, this time with Scheinman and the accordionist and singer **Rachelle Garniez** supporting.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Aug. 13-16: The **Barry Harris** quartet. A bracing new recording, "Live in New York" reminds us what a treasure we have in Harris, a dyed-in-the-wool bebopper who keeps the piano practices of Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell in clear view while forging a keyboard identity distinctly his own. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Aug. 11: **Hank Jones,** the dean of swing-to-bop piano and a model of ageless wit, turns eighty-five in style. Well-wishers—the New York jazz community, that is—will turn out to celebrate the milestone. Aug. 12-17: Starting the following night, the great man is joined by two estimable Basie vets, the saxophonist and flutist **Frank Wess** and the trombonist **Benny Powell,** in a tribute to Frank Sinatra. Aug. 19-24: The **Terence Blanchard** sextet. Periodically, Blanchard has to put down his pen—he's Spike Lee's main composer—and pick up a trumpet, reminding us that few mainstream modernists can touch him when he's at the top of his game. With **Lizz Wright.** The industry is buzzing about this comely singer and her début album, "Salt." It may not announce a fully mature talent, but she has a crisp voice, ambition, and a talent worth watching.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through Aug. 17: The **Ahmad Jamal** trio. While the majority of jazz pianists make occasional visits to the edge, peer over, and then scurry back to safety, Jamal lives there. With stream-of-consciousness logic, Jamal reorchestrates conventional tunes, fracturing rhythms and harmonies with gleeful abandon. Aug. 19-24: Bebop in its classic form will be the order of the night when the alto-saxophone master **Charles McPherson** hooks up with the dexterous trumpeter **Tom Harrell** for a tribute to Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

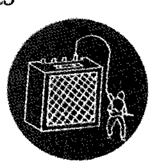
JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—The young saxophonist **Marcus Strickland** (here with his quartet on Aug. 23) has already paid his dues performing with such prestigious units as the Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall jazz orchestras, as well as with such leaders as Roy Haynes and Lonnie Plaxico.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Aug. 14-17: **Freddy Cole** continues his decade-plus comeback. Aug. 19-24: The **Dr. Lonnie Smith** trio, with special guest **David (Fathead) Newman.** Bring together the Hammond-organ titan Smith and the R. & B.-bred tenor saxophonist Newman and the first composer that comes to mind is . . . Beck? Against the odds, their new album, "Boogaloo to Beck: A Tribute," works. The irony-free grooves of the arch-ironist stimulate these two masters of old-school jazz funk. And if things don't come together live, they can always fall back on the blues. Dining.

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—Aug. 15-16: A sturdy, often inspired stylist, the trumpeter **Eddie Henderson** is deep in a midlife resurgence. He has long acknowledged Miles Davis as his main influence, and his latest recording, "So What," makes it all explicit; this quartet engagement is sure to focus on tunes associated with the late, great horn man.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Aug. 17: The **Larry Coryell** quartet. One of the forefathers of fusion, the guitarist Coryell plays by more traditional rules when he finds himself in the hallowed lair of the Vanguard. This fleet and inventive improviser can still maneuver with grace through a thorny chart. Aug. 19-24: The **Fred Hersch** trio. That his latest record, "Live at the Village Vanguard," is one of the most satisfying recordings of this superb pianist's career should make you want to rush over to the scene of the inspiration. Hersch's intimate communication with the bassist **Drew Gress** and the drummer **Nasheet Waits** puts a beautiful new spin on standards and makes the leader's lyrical originals gleam. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

POP NOTES



TREADING WATER, GAINFULLY
Jimmy Page has been content to sink into semi-retirement, occasionally reteaming with Robert Plant for low-altitude, ersatz Led Zep. Eric Clapton has continued to turn out tasteful adult blues so narcotic they could be used as sleeping pills. Meanwhile, Jeff Beck—who never really attained seventies superstardom due to his eclectic muse—has sneakily bested the other British guitar gods. **"Jeff"** (Epic), his third album in the last four years, picks up where the recent "Who Else!" and "You Had It Coming" left off; over dance-rock productions by artists such as Splattercell and Apollo 440 that range from the jittery to the abstract, Beck delivers a majestically idiosyncratic master class. Songs like "So What" and "Line Dancing with Monkeys" whir, grind, and pound with a surplus of harmonic and rhythmic ideas; at times, it sounds as if Beck, famous for tinkering with his collection of vintage cars, were playing power tools. Others, like the short, sweet "Bulgaria," prove that when Beck wants to he can draw a clean melodic line better than anyone. Beck's new records may not be as coherent as his mid-seventies fusion masterpieces, but they're revelatory for their stubborn artistry and the way they absorb current trends without drowning in them. And fans with a vested interest in Beck's traditionalism will be happy to learn that he's currently touring with B. B. King.

For more than a decade now, the New Jersey duo Ween has fused stoner comedy and gleeful scatology with a parodic instinct so accurate it verges on traditionalism. On **"Quebec"** (Sanctuary), Dean and Gene Ween are up to their old tricks, retreating to their lab to replicate as many pop styles as possible. "It's Gonna Be a Long Night," the opener, skewers punk-metal bands like Motörhead; "Tried and True" channels Arthur Lee's Love. And while too many tracks stretch out to Pink Floyd lengths and tempos, there's plenty of Weenish weirdness along the way. "Quebec" may wear out its welcome more quickly than other Ween albums, but it's a worthy enough addition to their ongoing project—to make rock-and-roll seem at once ridiculous and sublime.

—*Ben Greenman*

EXTRAORDINARY

"AN EXTRAORDINARY CREATION THAT BURSTS CINEMATIC BOUNDARIES."
-LISA SCHWARZBAUM, ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

EXHILARATING

"EXHILARATING...A ONE-OF-A-KIND MARVEL!"
-PETER TRAVERS, ROLLING STONE

BRILLIANT

"THIS ONE IS PLAIN BRILLIANT!"
-ROGER EBERT, CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

★★★★!
-BRUCE HANDY, VANITY FAIR

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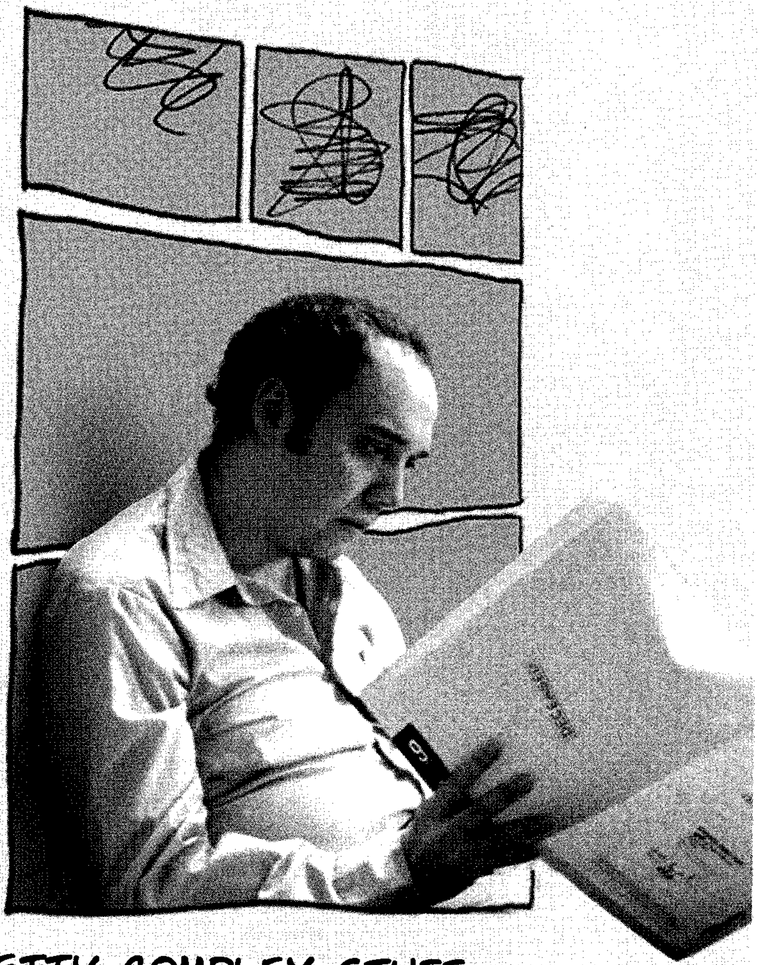
2003 GRAND JURY PRIZE
SUNDANCE
FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER
2003 FIPRESCI AWARD
(INTERNATIONAL FILM CRITICS ASSOC.)
CANNES
FILM FESTIVAL

PAUL GIAMATTI HOPE DAVIS

AMERICAN SPLENDOR

A FILM BY SHARI SPRINGER BERMAN & ROBERT PULCINI



ORDINARY LIFE IS PRETTY COMPLEX STUFF

HBO FILMS IN ASSOCIATION WITH FINE LINE FEATURES PRESENTS A GOOD MACHINE PRODUCTION A FILM BY SHARI SPRINGER BERMAN & ROBERT PULCINI PAUL GIAMATTI HOPE DAVIS "AMERICAN SPLENDOR" CASTING BY ANN GOULDER MUSIC SUPERVISOR LINDA COHEN MUSIC BY MARK SUOZZO EDITOR ROBERT PULCINI PRODUCTION DESIGNER THÉRÈSE DEPREZ DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY TERRY STACEY LINE PRODUCER CHRISTINE KUNEWA WALKER ASSOCIATE PRODUCER JULIA KING PRODUCER TED HOPE BASED ON THE COMIC BOOK SERIES "AMERICAN SPLENDOR" BY HARVEY PEKAR AND "OUR CANCER YEAR" BY HARVEY PEKAR AND JOYCE BRABNER

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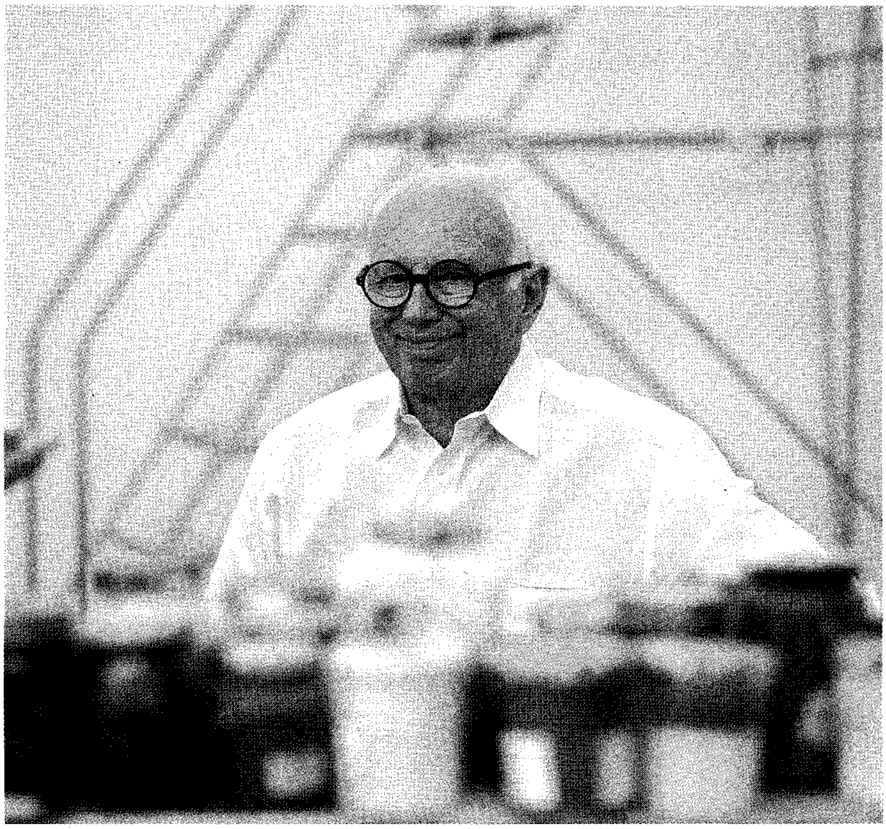
OPENS AUGUST 15

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—On May 16, 1703, the six-foot-eight-inch tsar Peter the Great stood in a swamp beside the Neva River and proclaimed it the site for a new city that would take his name and earn the sobriquet "the Venice of the North." For **"Celebrating St. Petersburg,"** the Met raided its collection to mark the tricentennial of imperial Russia's capital city, and the small exhibition is a dazzler, stuffed with German silver, Sèvres porcelain, and snuffboxes encrusted with gold, enamel, ivory, and jewels from the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-96), an era aptly dubbed the "Age of Diamonds." Through Jan. 25. ♦ After witnessing the atrocities of the First World War as a medic, the German painter Max Beckmann took up Expressionism to "reproach God for his errors." The museum recently acquired the famous "Hell" portfolio, eleven black-and-white lithographs that chronicle Beckmann's visit to Berlin in 1919 during the March Rebellion, when twelve hundred people were killed in two days. The original owner of the portfolio, the industrialist Hugo Stinnes, appears in a stinging caricature as a puppeteer dangling a marionette emperor, surrounded by human skulls and sacks of cash. This series' masterly balance between chaotic and carnivalesque is an amuse-bouche for the retrospective of the artist currently at MOMA QNS. Through Aug. 31. ♦ A playful roof-garden sculpture—a painted aluminum cottage with a red roof, white and yellow walls, and a blue chimney—by Roy Lichtenstein, the late Pop artist, sits on its own little lawn with a sign warning viewers to keep off the grass. Through Nov. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)



Ellsworth Kelly, whose works are on view at the Whitney, in his studio.

JACK SHEAR

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—**"Ansel Adams at 100"** is a retrospective of the mountain man, whose exquisitely made, self-conscious photographs of spectacular Western scenery are a hard case in modern art. In form, Adams was impeccably modernist, and he had a command of photographic aesthetics as thoroughgoing, within its narrower range, as Edward Weston's. In feeling, Adams was a populist romantic, retreading sentimental conventions of God's country. To enjoy his imperious mastery and his swooning piety equally does not seem possible; they trip each other up. And the hanging of the smallish prints in the warehouse space of MOMA QNS is a blunder—the show looks dwarfed and dismal. Through Nov. 3. ♦ This succinct retrospective tests Max Beckmann's long-pending claim to parity with the modern masters of Paris. The curator Robert Storr's trenchant selection and airy hanging make a winning case. How does one look at art that is laden with elusive, often quite lugubrious portent? The show's answer: as painting. Beckmann's manipulations of aggressive, theatrical space are dazzlingly supple. The trick, for the viewer, is to receive the pictures passively, letting their organization declare itself. Even, or especially, when its imagery is gnarled and bizarre, a great Beckmann attains startling unity, notably through making light-dark modelling inseparable from warm-cool color. Depth and surface become one. Beckmann does all the work: our role is to be bowled over. Through Sept. 29. ♦ **"Andy Warhol: Screen Tests,"** twenty-eight selections from the artist's series of portraits on film—lingering 16-mm. shots of various subjects. Through Sept. 1. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism"** is a concise, bewitching show of paintings, drawings, and sculptures—many of them making their first trip outside Russia. Through Sept. 7. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—For **"Ellsworth Kelly: Red Green Blue,"** the museum presents many of the rectangular paintings created between 1958 and 1965 in which the artist varied his use of simple shapes and limited his color to the title hues (along with the occasional white or black). Related sketches, collage studies, and other preparatory works are included. Opens Aug. 14. ♦ In **"The American Effect,"** forty-seven artists and filmmakers react to the myths and policies of the United States. Through Oct. 12. ♦ For sheer joy in materials, no one can compete with Sarah Sze. Binder clips, bright-blue Windex bottles, fake grass, PVC pipe, drinking straws, orange string—put it all together in the Whitney's moatlike sunken courtyard and you've got **"The Triple Point of Water."** This refers to the solid, liquid, and gaseous states of H_2O, and it's an ethereal title, but the elaborate installation is a marvel, a delicate, multilevel habitat, a miniature city or ecosystem animated by little fans and burbling aquariums. Through Oct. 9. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM AT ALTRIA
120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (212-878-2550)—Corporate lobbies don't generally conjure hippie communes. Katy Grinnan has managed the trick with a freewheeling installation that sprouts corn, peppers, and tomatoes growing in plastic buckets of soil. The ambitious show suggests early Jason Rhoades or a 4-H version of Sarah Sze with its eclectic sprawl of everyday materials (aside from the vegetable elements, there are aluminum beams, grow lights, and a plastic bench). Some aspects make use of the building's existing greenery: a brightly patterned mobile dangling from the ceiling (Calder by way of Ken Kesey) seems to have shed layers into the treetops below. Through Jan. 4. (Open weekdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—Some notes on chocolate: to make a bar of dark chocolate, you need about twenty cacao seeds—a princely sum in the Aztec markets of pre-Columbian Mexico, where *cacahuatl* had been consumed since 600 B.C. A rain-forest midge no bigger than a capital letter on this page pollinates the cacao tree. Sugar was not added to chocolate until Spanish conquistadores imported it to Europe, and nearly all the chocolate produced in the U.S. during the Second World War was reserved for military use. Want more? The **"Chocolate"** show illustrates a cornucopia of ecological, technological, and cultural facts about the essential indulgence, with interactive exhibits, artifacts, and, of course, free samples. Through Sept. 7. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Willem van Tetrode: Bronze Sculptures of the Renaissance."** When the Dutch sculptor van Tetrode (circa 1525-1580) went to Italy, he studied with Benvenuto Cellini and plied his trade by casting small but heroic bronzes after classical masterworks such as the Apollo Belvedere and the Medici Venus. He returned to Delft in 1567 and initiated a craze for such statuettes, some forty of which are now on view, predominantly brawny Herculeses and miniature Mercurys. Tetrode's emphasis on torqued musculature earned him comparison to Michelangelo, and his influence on younger compatriots such as Hendrick Goltzius makes this show a pendant to the Met's exhibition of Goltzius's paintings, prints, and drawings. Through Sept. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Friday evenings until 9; and Sundays, 1 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—The concert posters of Art Chantry have beckoned Seattle-area concertgoers since the late seventies. Each flaunts its throwback influences (comics, filmstrips, and vintage catalogues) to make ironic suggestions about the explosiveness of talent—it seems overly optimistic to hope that the Teengenerate show, for example, could live up to Chantry's edgy, urbane silk screen on a bullet-riddled metal sheet. In addition to pitching for his usual clients—underground acts from punk to grunge—he has also pushed for practicing safe sex. One public-service poster features a police officer (badge No. 69) brandishing a condom, under the helpful note "If you can say 'condom' in English, you know how to say 'condom' in French, Italian, and Spanish!!" Through Aug. 31. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6, and Saturday evenings until 9.)

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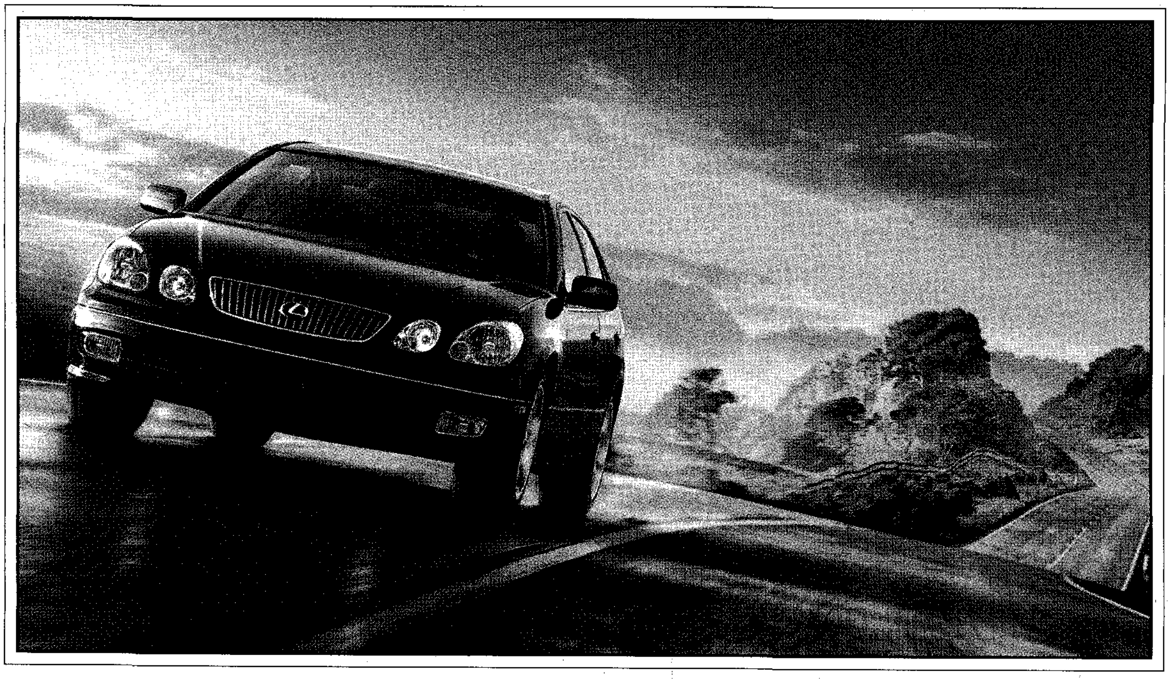

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STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—At the top of the stairs, at the entrance to **"Hands On Hands Down,"** a bright-red yarn sculpture by Louis Cameron, a minimalist web that's part Fred Sandback and part Spider-Man, alerts viewers that the museum's three artists-in-residence are into handmade craft and popular culture. Mickalene Thomas embeds canvases with thousands of rhinestones, producing haute-kitsch imagery (pinups, panthers) that allude to Pointillism, the all-over patterns of Pollock, and black-velvet paintings in one sparkly swoop. Deborah Grant also goes for all-over coverage, in riotous paintings that combine comic books and social commentary as she cuts panels into iconic shapes—Mickey Mouse, the Chanel logo, an Oscar statuette—then covers every inch with black-and-white cartoons. Through Sept. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES–UPTOWN

Summer-hours warning: many galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Others follow the normal Tuesday-to-Saturday schedule. It's best to call ahead.

JEREMY BLAKE
Spend an hour watching the world go by in Times Square and you will probably have absorbed as much visual stimulus as you can manage. But save sixty seconds of attention for the last minute of each hour, when Jeremy Blake's digital video appears on the NBC Panasonic Astrovision screen, at Forty-third and Broadway facing north. "Cowboy Waltz," which is sponsored by the public-art foundation Creative Time, turns the bluster of Broadway into hypnotic abstract cascades of shape and color. The seconds click down; a batlike blue-gray form morphs and flutters, then dwindles to a red dot, as if film were burning out in a projector. Then it's gone till next time. Note: No showings at 7:59 A.M., 8:59 A.M., or 6:59 P.M. Through Sept. 30. (Presented by Creative Time. 212-206-6674.)

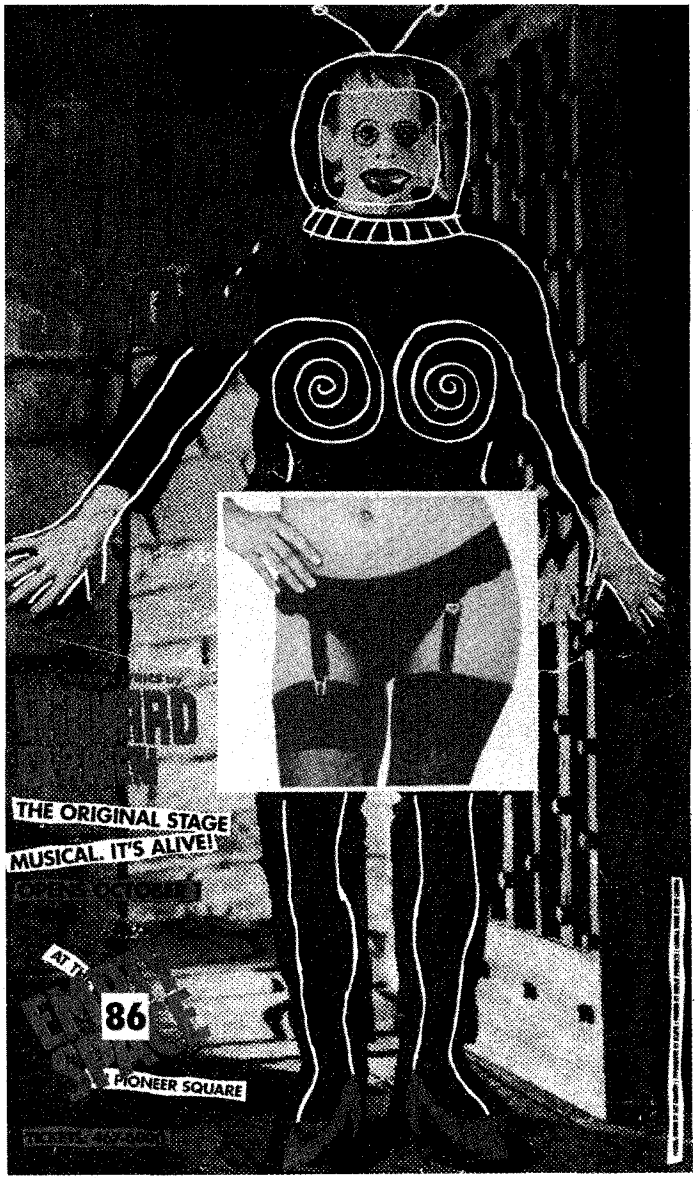
"CONTEMPORARY MASTER STONE SCULPTORS OF ZIMBABWE"
Globalization produces interesting reversals and redoublings of cultural exchange, and in this exhibition a Picassoid or Henry Moore-ish high modernism is reimported from southern Africa. It's interesting to imagine a given sculptural manner—say, the elongated, abstracted, or "primitivist" human form—travelling back and forth from Africa to Europe and West Fifty-seventh Street in the space of a hundred years. Unfortunately, the objects themselves are about as arresting as classy hotel-lobby decorations. Through Aug. 29. (Reece, 24 W. 57th St. 212-333-5830.)

"CORNER OF MINE"
What appears to be a show of three photographers, all working in crisp, lush, large-scale black-and-white, turns out on second glance to contain a pair of Heidi McFall's Photo-Realist pastel drawings. These are pleasant formal double-takes. In terms of content, though, McFall's work and that of the two photographers, Hannah Collins and Diana Kingsley—vignettes of hands hovering on guitar strings or cradling tennis balls, roses on a table, a man's shirt-and-tie-clad torso on a couch, a woman with demurely averted eyes—offer not real romance but a sleek and riskless interlude of style. Through Aug. 29. (Castelli, 59 E. 79th St. 212-249-4470.)

"H_2O"
Water, water everywhere, and most of it simulated: the twenty-four artists in "H_2O" all depict the element, but only Mia Westerlund Roosen's tabletop model "Lake Louise" and Samm Kunce's "Hydroculture," with goldfish and hydroponic lettuce, actually contain any. Elsewhere, the stuff of life is represented in video, photography, sculpture, and drawing, even in Annea Lockwood's ambient recordings from various sites along the Hudson River. Other standouts include Sally Mann's photograph "The Three Graces" (a trio of standing females of different ages, linking arms and joyously peeing), Jeanne Silverthorne's cast-rubber enlargement of a sweat pore, and Amy Jenkins's video of a woman bathing, projected from the ceiling into a tiny claw-foot tub on the floor. Through Aug. 22. (Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 212-223-2227.)

"PUDDLE-WONDERFUL"
Three hundred and fifty-five pounds of blue-and-white candy—the combined weight of the late artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres and his lover—spill from a corner at the entrance to this elegant, intelligent show of conceptual art with a decorative bent. (Viewers are invited to eat the mints, effectively completing the piece by depleting it.) In the next room, a grid of wax panels (a pixellated self-portrait by Ferrán Martin) is installed in a skylight; as it melts, puddles of purple and pink accumulate on the floor like cheerful tears. Through Aug. 15. (Artemis Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave. 212-445-0444.)

"RECENT ACQUISITIONS"
This display, which is more a bazaar than a curated exhibition, nevertheless includes an impressive setting of gems—in the Expressionist category, woodcuts and lithographs by the great Käthe Kollwitz, a lovely little Schiele watercolor that looks like a Japanese print, and a searing, effortless crayon sketch by Klimt of a nude old woman. "Self-Taught Artists" presents not only Grandma Moses and Henry Darger but the weirdly precise Russian Nikifor Zaiatz, who illustrates "Examples of Appropriate and Inappropriate Dress" (tall boots and a hat with a little bell, respectively). Through Sept. 12. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 212-245-6734.)


THE ORIGINAL STAGE MUSICAL. IT'S ALIVE!
86
PIONEER SQUARE

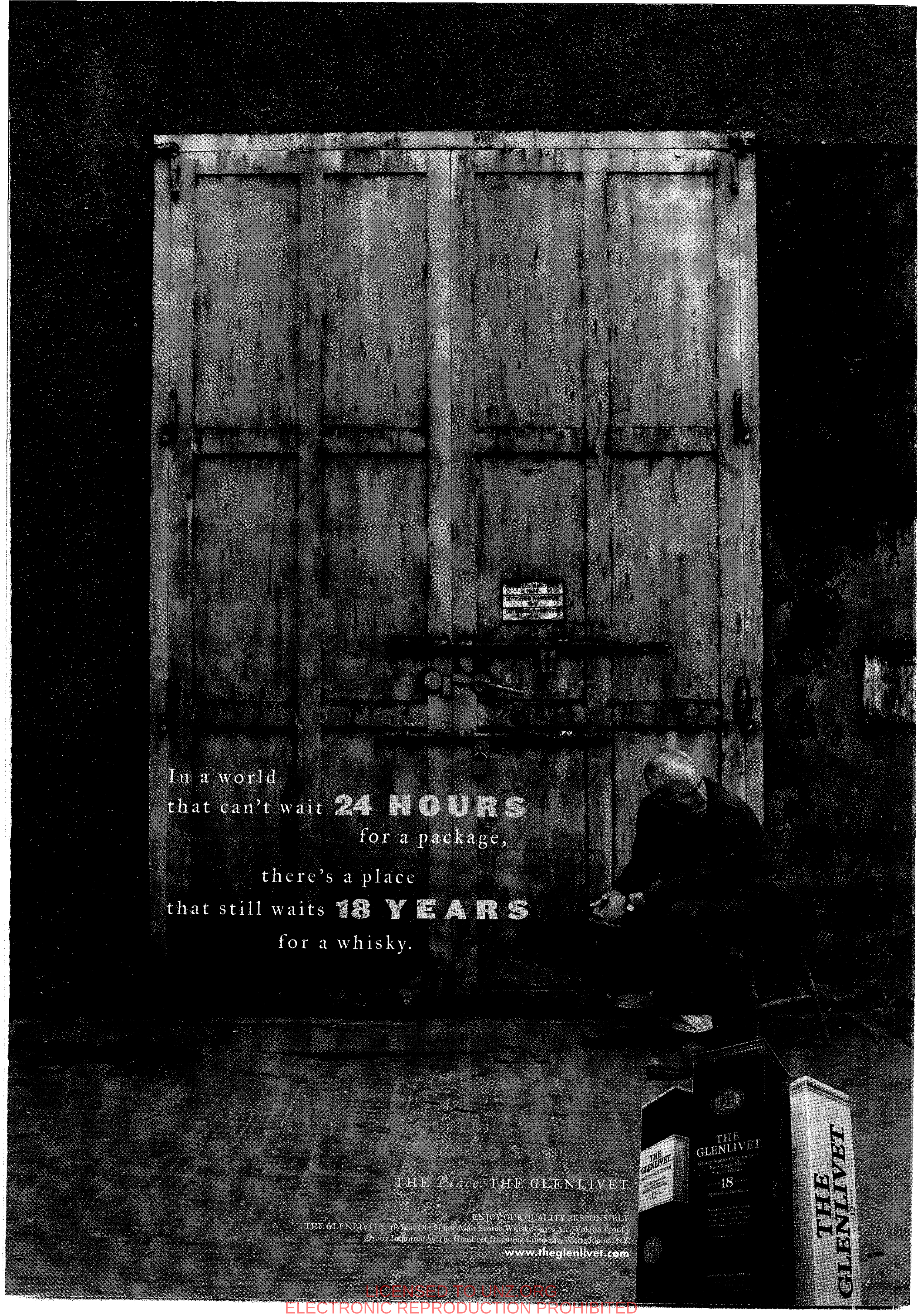
A poster for "The Rocky Horror Show," by Art Chantry, from an exhibition of his work at P.S. 1.

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

"IN FULL VIEW"
Back in the day, summer shows were the equivalent of a meal made from leftovers: the results could satisfy, but they were casually thrown together. This summer changed that with a glut of exceptional exhibitions, including this eloquent entry of thirty years' worth of art that flirts with invisibility. In the main gallery a Sol LeWitt wall drawing spans one wall in a whisper of graphite, adjacent to a Carl Andre floor piece made of glass rods. The only color is provided by Tom Friedman's dots, which creep up a corner as if to perforate it. Elsewhere, a vertical sliver of mirror by Olafur Eliasson and a pair of delicate chain webs by Jim Hodges vie for blink-and-you'll-miss-it status. Through Sept. 13. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

"REVEREND JEN'S LOWER EAST SIDE TROLL MUSEUM"
To celebrate Printed Matter's publication of the hilarious "Really Cool Neighborhood," a combination Lower East Side guide and anti-landlord musical, the Reverend Jen, an ordained minister and self-proclaimed "sex symbol for the insane" (the Rev does not go out in public without a pair of plastic elf ears) transforms the back room of the bookstore into a Mecca for troll lovers. Most of the room is devoted to an extensive collection of the garish-haired dolls (there's even a troll Barbie). The show also has paintings and works on paper that resemble line drawings in a coloring book, as well as previous publications including a self-published zine, *Beer Is Magic.* Through Sept. 6. (Printed Matter, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-925-0325.)

"TODAY'S MAN"
In a clever inversion of the dictum "Bigger is better," the gallery installs more than fifty small-scale works by and about men. Portraiture dominates, from a gem of an Alex Katz canvas, from 1985, of three nattily dressed friends to Richard Phillips's black-and-silver drawing of the rapper Curtis Jackson (he looks like a surly extra from "Pirates of the Caribbean"). The only intimation that size matters is a sculpture in the center of the gallery, a bronze bust by Marco Boggia Sella depicting a man with the kind of nose they used to call strong. Through Sept. 13. (John Connelly Presents, 526 W. 26th St. 212-337-9563.)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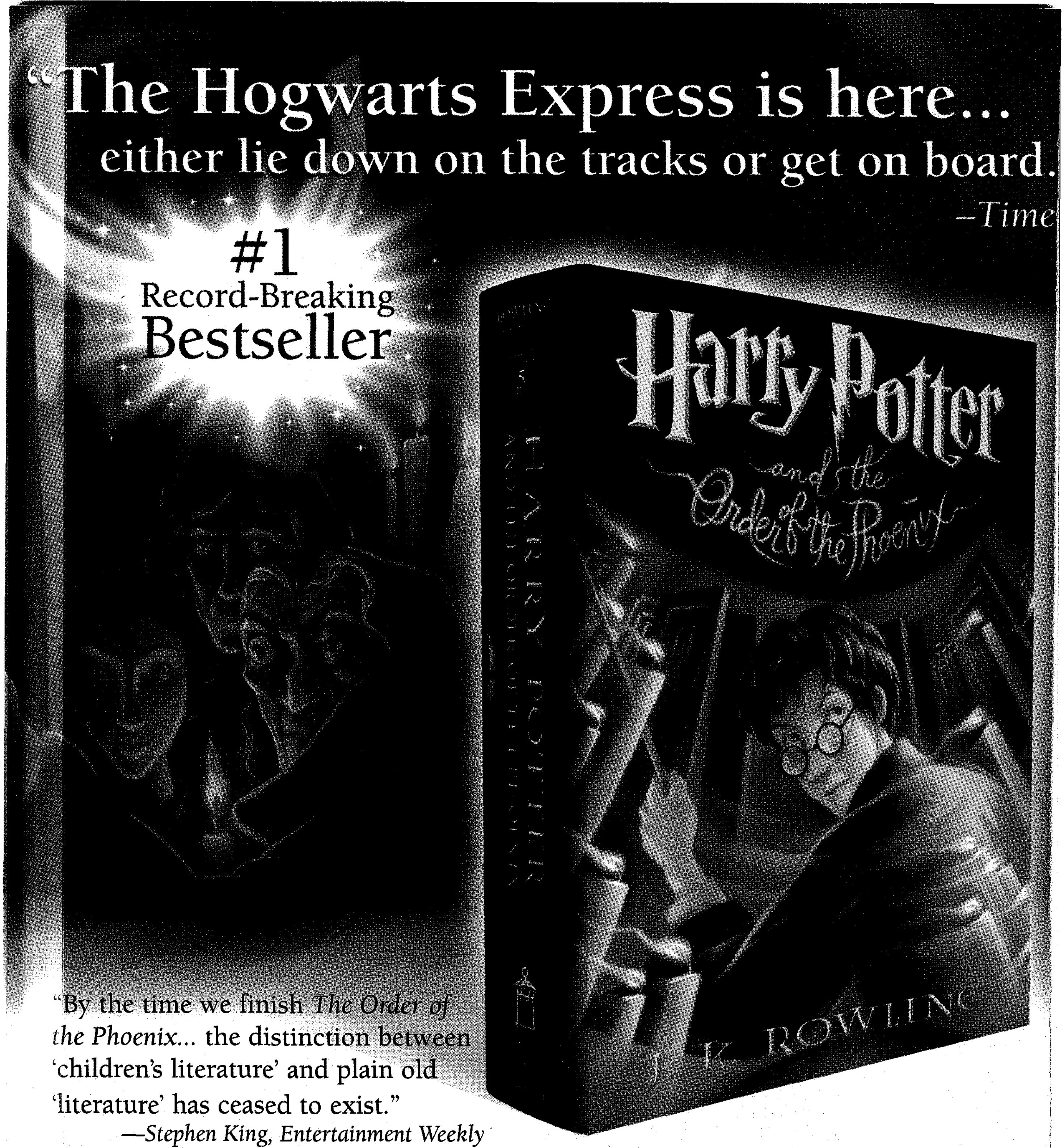

"The Hogwarts Express is here...
either lie down on the tracks or get on board."
–Time

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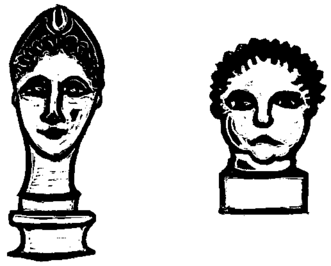
ARTHUR A. LEVINE BOOKS

BOOK CURRENTS

All Greek

You wait thousands of years for a family tree of all the Greek gods, and then two come along at once. The first, **A GENEALOGICAL CHART OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY** (North Carolina), began in 1964 as the hobby of the late Harold Newman and was recently completed by Jon O. Newman, his son. An enterprise of Daedalian complexity, the complete chart spreads along seventy-two huge pages and contains 3,673 mythological figures, all interrelated and ultimately descended from Chaos, a primal force mentioned by Hesiod who is the great-great-grandparent of Zeus. The sexual activity of classical deities does not lend itself to neat tabulation; Zeus and Apollo, notoriously promiscuous, appear with alarming frequency. Undeterred, the Newmans (both lawyers) list alternate kinships in the index and maintain that there is a "high degree of generational consistency," so that, for instance, many of the participants in the Trojan War seem to be "within just two generations of each other."



HUGO GUINNESS

A less forbidding version appears next month in the form of **THE GENEALOGY OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY** by Vanessa James (Gotham). James eliminates some of the more arcane characters and includes illustrations and short explanatory paragraphs alongside the names. Printed on one long concertinalike page, the table can be read like a book or unfolded into a seventeen-foot-long frieze—gods on one side, mortals on the other. Simplification has its benefits; the knotty ways of Greek heredity can ensnare even the most organized mind. As James comments with tactful understatement, "The Greek practice of marrying nieces to their uncles further confuses strict distinctions between generations."

—*Leo Carey*

GALLERIES-SOHO

CLEMENS WEISS
If prophets doodled on their morning papers, the results might look like these drawings. Angels, erupting volcanoes, alligators, and comets swirl through miasmas of hot orange and red, sometimes affixed directly to newspaper, sometimes simply nodding to newspapers as a source (some works include words such as "possibly" and "enjoy" in *Times* typeface). The works are framed in heavy glass crisscrossed with seams of glue; there are also crystallographic glass-and-glue stellae and shelving units. A Blakean grandeur is implied, but on the whole, as one partially obscured headline puts it, the work is about "big visions unfulfilled." Through Aug. 1. (Ronald Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 212-226-3232.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

TOMOKO SAWADA
Sawada's witty and buoyant show—the young Japanese photographer's first in America—is at once highly allusive and wonderfully inspired. The first half, "Omiai" (referring to the Japanese tradition in which young men and women trade photos with prospective mates for arranged marriages), is a series of studio portraits starring Sawada dressed in different costumes—gaudy, gold-threaded, exaggeratedly formal kimonos in some, plain, proper business suits in others—while grinning enthusiastically for the camera. In the second series, Sawada has assembled different photo-booth strips of herself—transformed, with complex hairdos and makeup, into schoolgirls, drag queens, whacked-out housewives, sullen children, and tentative adolescents—into large black-and-white grids. It's impossible to look at any of Sawada's photographs and not feel the presence of her predecessors (Andy Warhol, Cindy Sherman, and Nikki Lee), yet they aren't derivative. The whole thing, from conceit to execution, is so bouncy, outlandish, and unexpected that it's difficult to look away. Through Sept. 6. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 212-752-1223.)

"ENCHANTED EVENING"
The most arresting images here—from Bill Brandt's velvety garden party to Alessandra Sanguinetti's fitful dreamer—make the night appear magical, a time of fantasy and otherworldly possibilities. Refreshingly, the curators have chosen beauty over grit; though many of the pictures have been taken in the city or near some man-made construction, there are no scenes of squalor or outright seamy menace. What we're left with is a collection of images in which nighttime's charms and dangers are far more subtle and illusory, as in Abelardo Morell's photograph of a house lit by ropes of twinkling lights, its unearthly glow as seductive as it is ghostly. Through Aug. 22. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

"PROTEST"
A collection of many iconic images of moments of protest, along with a few surprises, this show pits Burt Glinn's Fidel Castro against Steve Schapiro's George Wallace, and Garry Winogrand's angry New York City construction workers against Bruce Davidson's images of the 1963 March on Washington. Marc Riboud's closeup of a woman holding a flower in front of the bayonet of a National Guardsman at an anti-Vietnam War rally presages Stuart Franklin's panorama of a lone man in front of a line of four tanks in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Angry skinheads and Klansmen pale in contrast to both Leonard Freed's lone nurse in hospital whites protesting pornography in Times Square and Diane Arbus's unforgettable "Patriotic Young Man with a Flag." Through Aug. 29. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Cuba on the Verge."** Abelardo Morell, who left Cuba with his family forty years ago, when he was fourteen, is well known for his camera-obscura images of cityscapes and industrial areas, flipped and fuzzy on apartment and hotel walls. His exposures last up to eight hours, and pictures made on a recent trip to Cuba carry an emotional weight, a sense of loss and of feeling trapped, at which his other work can only hint. Other photographers, like Virginia Beahan and Carrie Mae Weems, reach similar heights, whether looking at history or Afro-Cuban identity. The show also gives the opportunity to see work by other, lesser-known Cuban artists, notably Manuel Piña's lushly colored crumbling walls in Havana, Abigail Gonzáles's moments of sexual joy, and René Peña's black-and-white images of handwritten letters sent by Cubans to family members abroad, often asking for financial assistance. The show speaks clearly of the conundrums and fleeting pleasures of living today in Fidel Castro's experiment. Through Aug. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

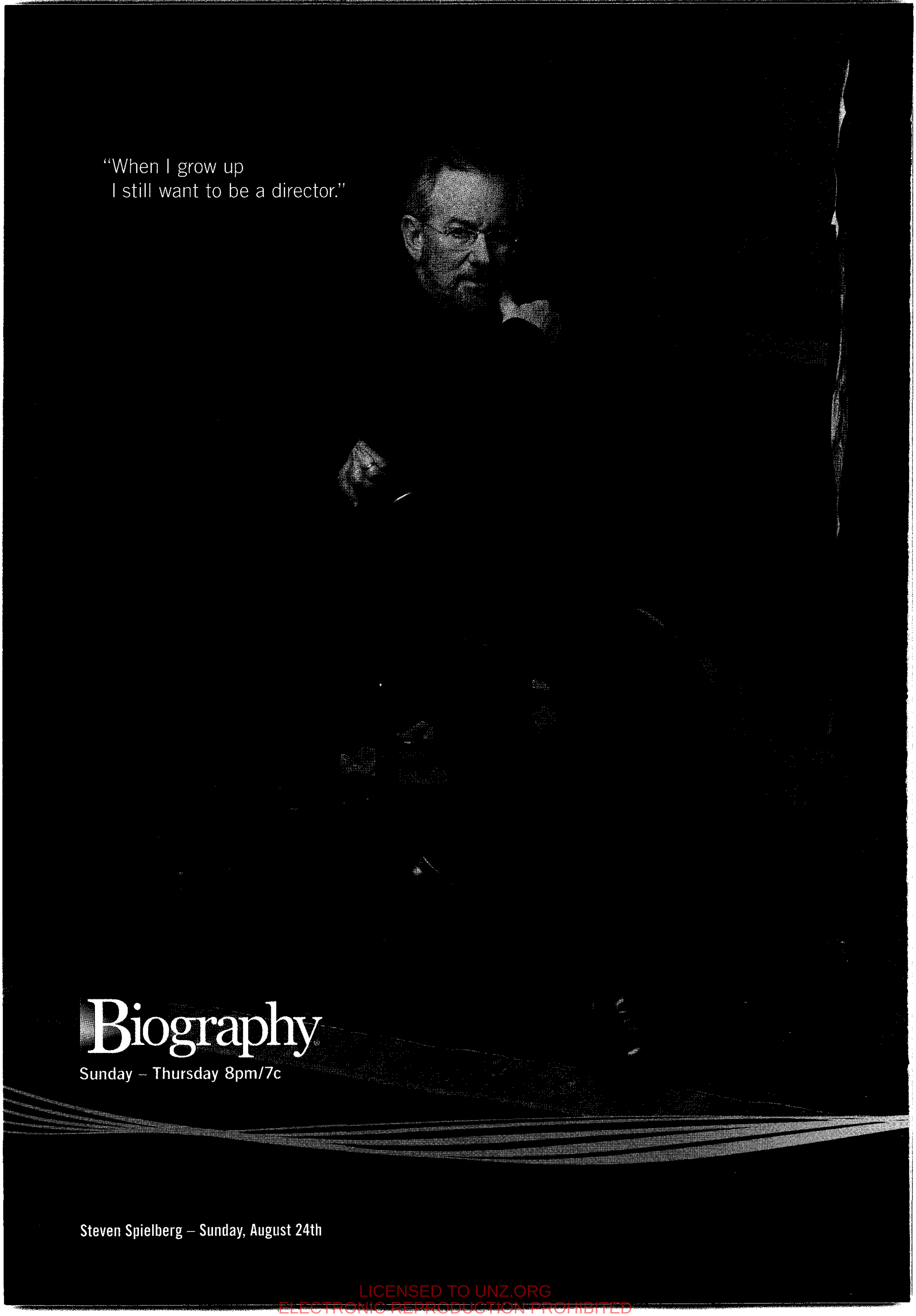
ANSEL ADAMS
Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 212-989-7600. Through Aug. 22.
"CMYK: PART 2"
Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 212-517-3766. Through Sept. 6.
"OASES"
Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930. Through Aug. 22.

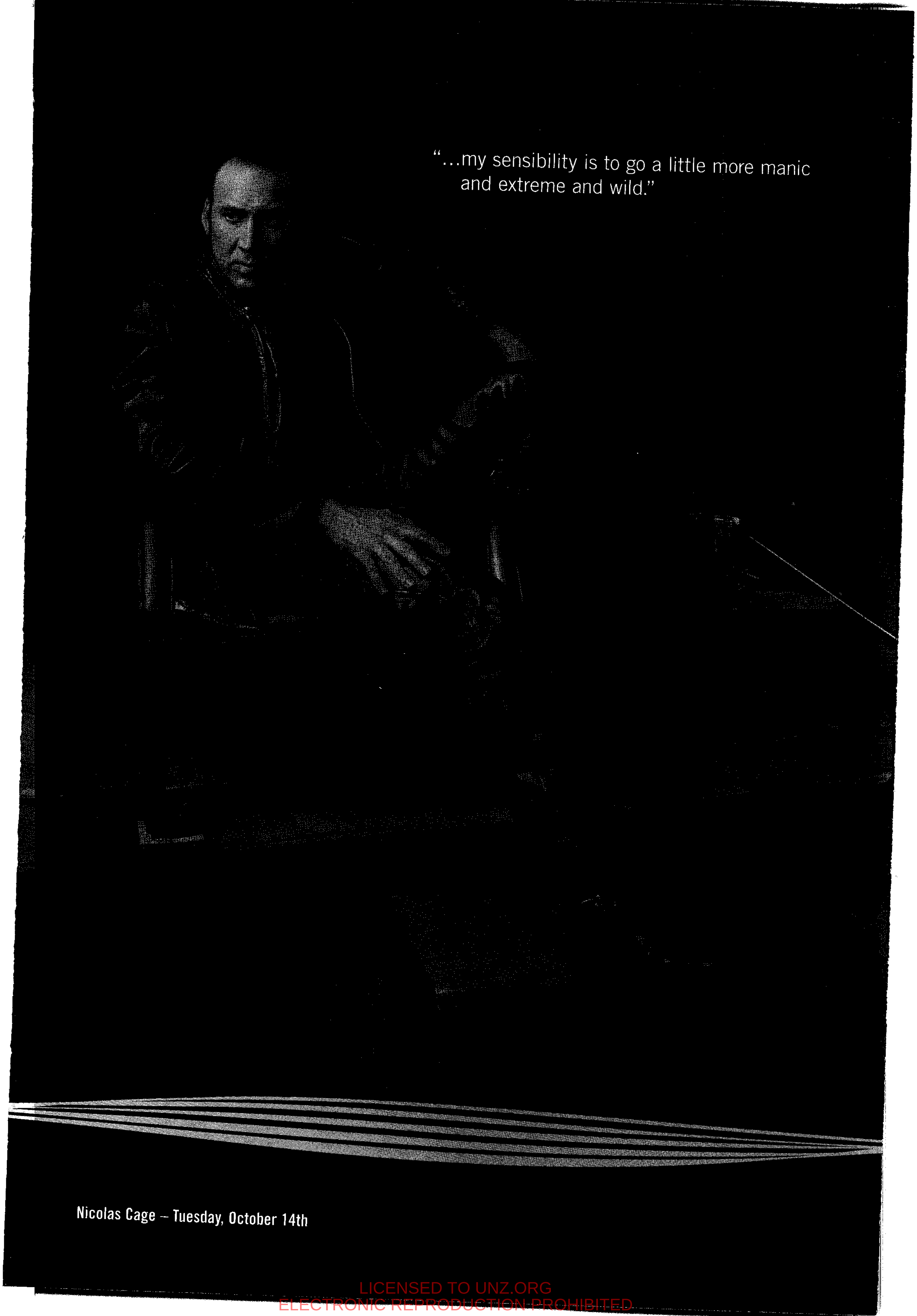
CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS IN TOWN

BARGEMUSIC
Aug. 14-15 at 7:30: Steven Beck, a smart young composer-pianist with energy to spare, offers an evening of Bach and Shostakovich preludes and fugues in the first of several concerts in the coming days; for a complete schedule, see www.bargemusic.org. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

NEW YORK CHORAL SOCIETY SUMMER SINGS
This series of open rehearsals at CAMI Hall gives any choral enthusiast a chance to work with some of New York's finest choral directors, for a small fee; the Society provides the sheet music, piano accompaniment, and even some refreshments. There are three sessions left, all held at 7:30. Aug. 14: Francisco Núñez, of the Young People's Chorus of New York City, conducts Handel's "Messiah." ♦ Aug. 19: Lyndon Woodside, the conductor of the Oratorio Society, the city's oldest amateur chorus, will be conducting the Fauré Requiem and Poulenc's Gloria. ♦ Aug. 21: John Daly Goodwin of the New York Choral Society will lead a workshop—a rehearsal plus discussion—on Mozart's C Minor Mass. (165 W. 57th St. Tickets at the door.)

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL
Aug. 14 at 8 and Aug. 16 at 5: Nicholas McGegan leads his Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and a clutch of superb young singers (including Lisa Saffer and Mark Padmore) in a Mark Lamos production of Mozart's **"Il Re Pastore."** (La Guardia Concert Hall, Amsterdam Ave. at 65th St.) ♦ Aug. 15-16 at 8: For more than forty years Alicia de Larrocha has offered, to a grateful public, piano playing of rare equipoise, balancing the insistent rhythmic impulses of the Spanish style with a delectable lyricism. Her Mozart is every bit as welcome as her Granados, and in her farewell performance at Mostly Mozart she will play the Concerto No. 23 in A Major in a concert with the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra, conducted by Emmanuel Krivine, that also includes Schubert's Symphony No. 3 in D Major. (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 17 at 5: David Daniels, the dulcet-toned countertenor, offers an intimate recital of songs by Purcell, Dowland, Bellini, and others, with the guitarist Craig Ogden. (Alice Tully Hall.) ♦ Aug. 19-20 at 8: Louis Langrée conducts the orchestra in a program of Mozart (including the Piano Concerto No. 17 in G Major, with Peter Serkin) and Schubert (the Symphony No. 4, "Tragic"). (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 21 at 8: The pianist—and budding conductor—Leif Ove Andsnes brings his Norwegian Chamber Orchestra to Mostly Mozart for a concert of Rameau, Haydn, and Mozart (the Piano Concerto No. 18 in B-Flat Major and the Symphony No. 40). (Alice Tully Hall.) ♦ Aug. 22-23


"When I grow up
I still want to be a director."
Biography
Sunday – Thursday 8pm/7c
Steven Spielberg – Sunday, August 24th



"...my sensibility is to go a little more manic and extreme and wild."

Nicolas Cage – Tuesday, October 14th

"I really wanted to be taken seriously...
Mary Tyler Moore...
doesn't that sound serious?"

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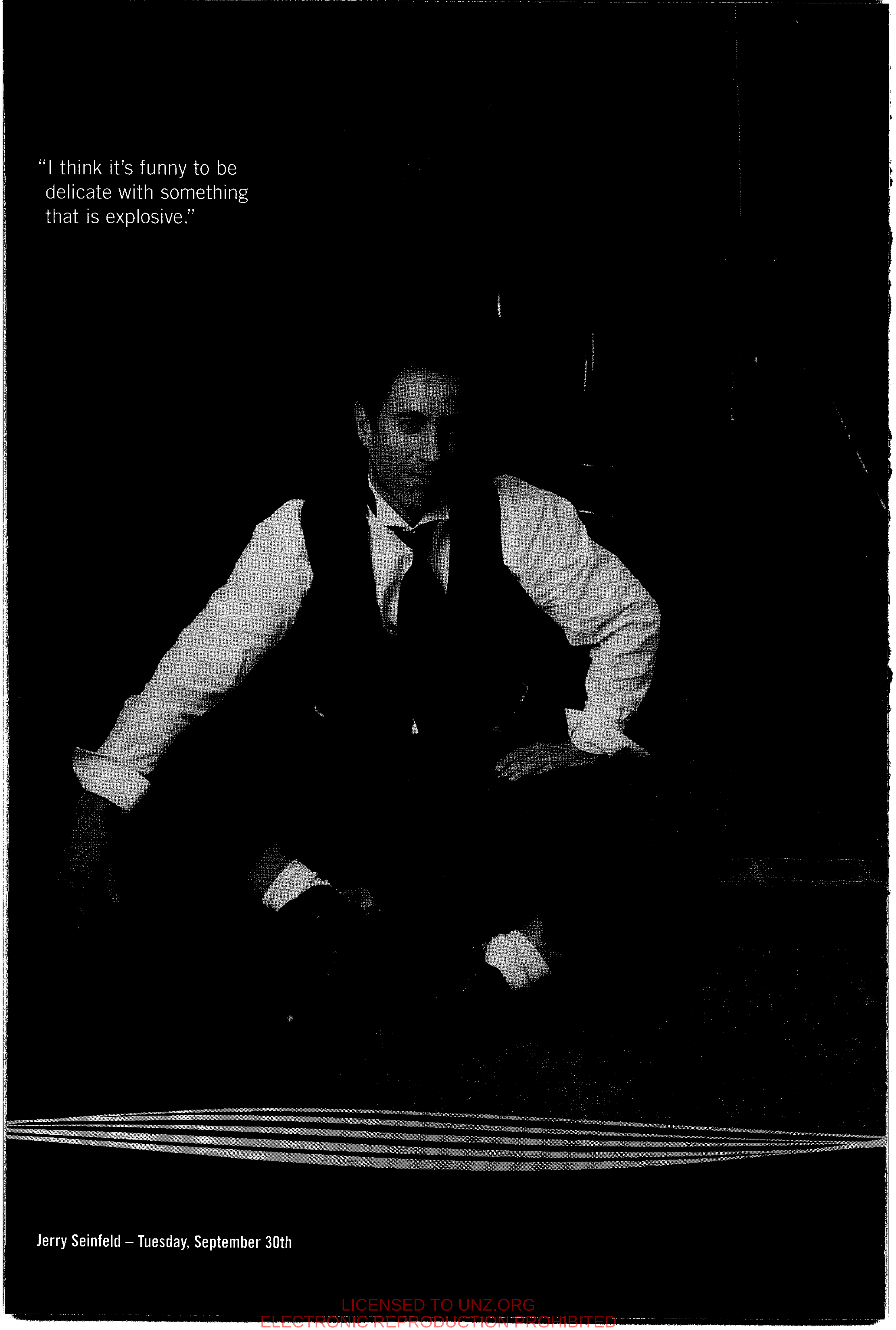
Mary Tyler Moore – Sunday, September 7th



"I think it's funny to be
delicate with something
that is explosive."

Jerry Seinfeld – Tuesday, September 30th

"Look at me,
I'm too beautiful
to be a fighter."

Biography®
Sunday – Thursday 8pm/7c

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Muhammad Ali – Wednesday, September 3rd

TABLES FOR TWO

TUBBY HOOK CAFÉ

348 Dyckman St., at the Hudson River (212-567-8086)—Perhaps Mayor Bloomberg should come up with a city ordinance against dining outside, at least the kind of outside that New Yorkers have been putting up with for years: bus fumes, honking horns, heat that curdles your sauces. Still, on one of these dog-day nights, with the sun setting hazily down the cross streets, it's reasonable to crave a little breeze and a view that is not comprised entirely of right angles. In which case you basically have two options: you can go out to the ballpark or you can go up to Tubby Hook.

Tubby Hook Café lies at the foot of Dyckman Street, where it runs into the Hudson River, about a mile north of the George Washington Bridge. It truly is right on the water. There's a beer garden abutting a marina and a wooden patio that extends out over the river. There's even a little beach. On a recent evening, the bar was occupied mostly by Red Sox fans—or local Dominicans rooting for Pedro Martínez in a Sox game against the Yankees, on TV. The better view was of the New Jersey Palisades, and the sun sinking behind them, and of the bridge, where you could see that the lower deck was the way to go. The Cloisters, just to the south, were bathed in orange light: a sort of commuter's alpenglow. A couple of guys on WaveRunners swerved around in the current. Kids played in the grass. Salsa played loudly. The waitresses brought tin buckets filled with ice and bottles of beer. *Pura vida.*

There's always a catch, of course, and at Tubby Hook, unfortunately, it's the food. You don't expect much—it's basically a summer burger shack—but that still doesn't prepare you for the dish-towel deep-fry they try to sneak by you: prawns, potatoes, fish, and chicken, all of a sogginess suggesting that they have been dipped in the river itself. Even a longtime batter fiend found himself pushing aside the pale pods of shrimp and ordering up extra rounds of the Dominican pilsner, Presidente, instead, to ensure that his beautiful evening included an adequate number of calories. The burgers and hot dogs, however, were fine, as burgers and hot dogs usually are. Night fell and the dancing started and the Presidentes came and went, like so many buckets of oats. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $5.95-$15.)

—*Nick Paumgarten*

at 8: Langrée wraps up his first season as music director of Mostly Mozart with some major Haydn: "The Creation," sung in English by the soprano Cyndia Sieden, the tenor Bruce Ford, the bass Eric Owens, and the Riverside Choral Society. (Avery Fisher Hall.) (For tickets to all performances, call 212-721-6500.)

COMPOSERS COLLABORATIVE INC.: NON SEQUITUR 2003

The multidisciplinary mini-festival débuts three new poetry-and-music collaborations. Jed Distler (the group's artistic director) pairs New Wave and plainchant with the poet Carol Mirakove's fragmentary verse; Akemi Naito creates spare, electronica-tinged soundscapes for text by the in-your-face Nuyorican Poets Café veteran Edwin Torres; and Kala Pierson combines an electronic backdrop with violins, viola, cello, bass, and percussion while the poet Emanuel Xavier, another Nuyorican alum, overlays texts on gay themes. (Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery, at 1st St. 212-663-1967. Aug. 20-22 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA

Charles Dutoit's title as artistic director of the Philadelphia Orchestra's annual summer residency (held at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center) seems perfunctory at best, since the series' greatest-hits concerts could easily have been assembled by management. Yet Dutoit's gift for the Franco-Russian repertory is second to none, and the Fabulous Philadelphians perform it with opulent sound and incisive detail; here are some highlights. Aug. 13: In the first of four concerts devoted to the composers of St. Petersburg, Dutoit conducts music by Glinka, Shostakovich (the First Cello Concerto, with Boris Pergamenchikov), and Tchaikovsky (the Symphony No. 6, "Pathétique"). ♦ Aug. 14: Martha Argerich joins Dutoit and the orchestra in one of her signature pieces, Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3; music by Mussorgsky and Shostakovich (the Fifth Symphony) completes the program. ♦ Aug. 16: The Russian feast comes to a close with an all-Tchaikovsky program that includes the Violin Concerto (with Nikolaj Znaider, a dashing young Danish talent) and the "1812 Overture." ♦ Aug. 20: Argerich returns to offer not only Ravel's Concerto in G Major but also Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos (with Alexander Gurning); music by Mozart and Stravinsky, appropriately, rounds out the program. ♦ Aug. 23: Lang Lang, subtle as a sledgehammer but a titan of his instrument, brings Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto to Saratoga, the highlight of an overstuffed, grand-finale program that includes music by Grieg, Falla, and Ravel (the "Pavane" and "Boléro"). (Saratoga, N.Y. 518-587-3330. All performances begin at 8:15.)

TANGLEWOOD

Some highlights from the festival's final weeks. Aug. 13 at 8:30: The Boston Symphony Chamber Players, with the pianist Joseph Kalichstein, perform a program of Lutoslawski, Harbison, and Brahms (the Piano Quartet in C Minor). ♦ Aug. 14 at 8:30: The Juilliard String Quartet centers its program around the gritty poetry of Gunther Schuller's Fourth Quartet, preceded by one of Haydn's more passionate quartets (in G Minor, Op. 20, No. 3) and followed by Beethoven's Quartet in B-Flat Major, Op. 130—but with the charming, alternate Rondo finale, not the towering "Grosse Fuge." ♦ Aug. 16 at 8:30: John Williams, usually found conducting Boston Pops concerts, leads a classical B.S.O. program mixing British music of varying weight by Vaughan Williams, Elgar (the Cello Concerto, with Yo-Yo Ma), Tippett, and Maxwell Davies (the roisterous "Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise," with the bagpiper Iaian Massie); Ma also helps out in Williams's own Elegy for Cello and Orchestra. ♦ Aug. 17 at 2:30: James Conlon conducts the superb Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra in works by Zemlinsky (Conlon's arrangement of a suite from "A Florentine Tragedy"), Tchaikovsky (the Violin Concerto, with Joshua Bell), and Brahms. ♦ Aug. 19 at 8:30: Ma teams up with the pianist Emanuel Ax for a recital of Beethoven, Schumann, and Brahms. ♦ Aug. 20 at 8:30: The conductor-pianist Leif Ove Andsnes brings his Norwegian Chamber Orchestra to the Berkshires for a concert of Rameau, Haydn, and Mozart (the Piano Concerto No. 18 in B-Flat Major and the Symphony No. 40). ♦ Aug. 22 at 8:30: Neville Marriner leads the B.S.O. and some special guests (including the actor Christopher Plummer and the pianist Lang Lang) in an evening of Mendelssohn. ♦ Aug. 24 at 2:30: In the final classical concert of the season, Conlon conducts music for chorus and orchestra by Bach and Beethoven (the Ninth Symphony), with the vocal soloists Sondra Radvanovsky, Stephanie Blythe, Vinson Cole, and James Morris and the Tanglewood Festival Chorus. (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA

Aug. 14 and Aug. 22 at 8, Aug. 16 at 1:30, and Aug. 26 at 2: **"Don Giovanni,"** with Palle Knudsen, Maria Kanyova, Amy Burton, Kyle Ketelsen, and John McVeigh; Stewart Robertson conducts. ♦ Aug. 15 and Aug. 21 at 8 and Aug. 18 at 2: Chas Rader-Shieber's production of Handel's **"Orlando"** (which has a libretto loosely based on Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso") revels in the kind of goofy stage business that plagues all too many productions of the composer's operas—until the end, when the triumph of war over love is brought home with devastating force. The director is part of a nearly ideal creative team, featuring contributions by, among others, the superb sopranos Christine

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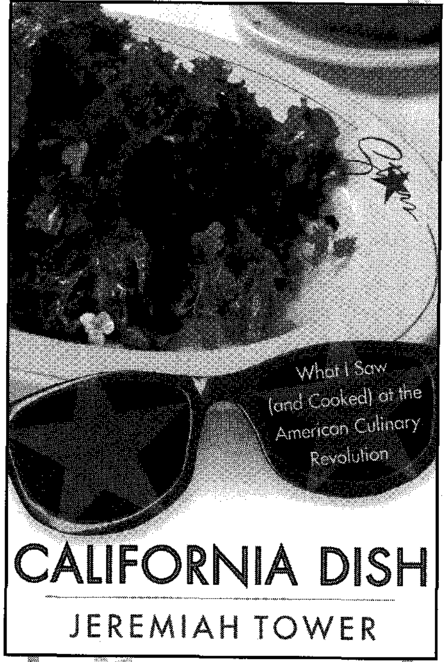
—RICK SMILOW, PRESIDENT, THE INSTITUTE OF CULINARY EDUCATION



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—JACQUES PÉPIN

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Brandes and Joyce Guyer; the countertenor Bejun Mehta (in the title role), who makes up for a less than ravishing tone with an incisive understanding of character; and the conductor Bernard Labadie, one of those rare maestros who understand that melodies are made of phrases, not just notes. ♦ Aug. 16 at 8 and Aug. 19 and Aug. 24 at 2: Offenbach's **"Bluebeard,"** with Tracey Welborn, Phyllis Pancella, and Anthony Laciura; Gerald Steichen conducts. ♦ Aug. 17 and Aug. 25 at 2 and Aug. 23 at 8: Kurka's **"The Good Soldier Schweik,"** featuring Anthony Dean Griffey in the title role; Robertson. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255. These are the final performances of the season.)

BRIDGEHAMPTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

One of the most intrepid of the summer festivals ends the season with style, completing its twentieth-anniversary year with new and recent music from New York and around the world. Aug. 15 at 7: The informal atmosphere of the Channing Daughters Winery is the special venue for an evening of tango-infused Argentinean music, mostly by Piazzolla, performed not only by such festival regulars as the flutist Marya Martin and the cellist Alisa Weilerstein but by the composer-pianist Pablo Ziegler, one of Piazzolla's leading disciples. ♦ Aug. 17 at 6:30: A classical concert of music by Vivaldi, Schubert (the String Quintet in C Major), and Bruce Adolphe ("Bridgehampton Concerto," a festival commission from 1991). ♦ Aug. 20 at 7:30: The world première of Paul Moravec's Chamber Symphony is the highlight of a program that also includes music by Suk, Vivier, and Dvořák (the Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major), performed by, among others, the violinist Martin Beaver and the cellist Clive Greensmith (members of the Tokyo String Quartet). ♦ Aug. 23 at 7:30: "Around the World and Back," a final concert of music ranging from Kevin Volans (the South African composer's "White Man Sleeps," made famous by the Kronos Quartet) to Leonard Bernstein. (Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church, Bridgehampton, N.Y. 631-537-6368.)

BARD MUSIC FESTIVAL: "JANÁČEK AND HIS WORLD"

Leon Botstein brings down the curtain on his first season in Bard College's new Frank Gehry-designed performance center with the last of two weekends of concerts and symposia on Leoš Janáček. The long roster of performers includes the singers Susan Platts and Simon O'Neill, the pianists Ken Noda and Anton Nel, the Avalon String Quartet, the New York Virtuoso Singers, and the American Symphony Orchestra with Botstein conducting. For a complete schedule of events, see www.summerscape.bard.edu.; pre-concert talks precede most of the programs. Aug. 15 at 8: Janáček, like Bartók after him, was a genuine composer-ethnographer, collecting and analyzing the folk music of his native land. In one of the festival's more unusual concerts, a group of Czech musicians will try to re-create the sounds that the composer might have heard in the field, juxtaposing the results with performances of some of Janáček's "civilized" parlor-music arrangements of the same material. ♦ Aug. 16 at 1:30: "Czech Modernism," a concert of string quartets and chamber music by Janáček (including the delightful wind sextet "Youth"), Martinů, Haas, and others. ♦ Aug. 16 at 5 and Aug. 17 at 11:30 A.M.: Two staged performances of the song cycle "The Diary of One Who Vanished," directed by Robin Guarino. ♦ Aug. 16 at 8: Orchestral works by Tchaikovsky ("The Voyevoda," a strange, late-period, proto-minimalist symphonic poem), Janáček (the Sinfonietta), and others. ♦ Aug. 17 at 1:30: Janáček's Capriccio for piano left-hand and chamber ensemble shares a program with music by Stravinsky (the Octet), Hindemith, Bartók, and Szymanowski. ♦ Aug. 17 at 5: A grand-finale orchestral concert of Janáček (three works, including the "Glagolitic Mass"), Szymanowski (the Stabat Mater), and Mussorgsky. (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900.)

MARLBORO FESTIVAL

The festival, chamber music's holiest shrine, completes its series of performances by some of the world's leading artists and their very talented students. Programs are available one week in advance at www.marlboromusic.org. (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. Aug. 15-16 at 8:30 and Aug. 17 at 2:30.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

The festival, the summer extension of the Yale School of Music, enters its final weeks. Aug. 16 at 8: The composer-pianist Joan Panetti, completing her final year as the festival's director, joins the Tokyo String Quartet for an evening of Schubert, Zemlinsky, and Schumann (the Piano Quintet). ♦ Aug. 22 at 8: The all-female Claremont Trio offers piano trios by Beethoven (the Trio in E-Flat Major, Op. 70, No. 2), Zwilich, and Ravel. ♦ Aug. 23 at 8: Music by Beethoven, Prokofiev (the rarely performed Quartet No. 2), and Schubert (the Quartet in G Major), offered by the young and expert Miró String Quartet. (Routes 44 and 272, Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN

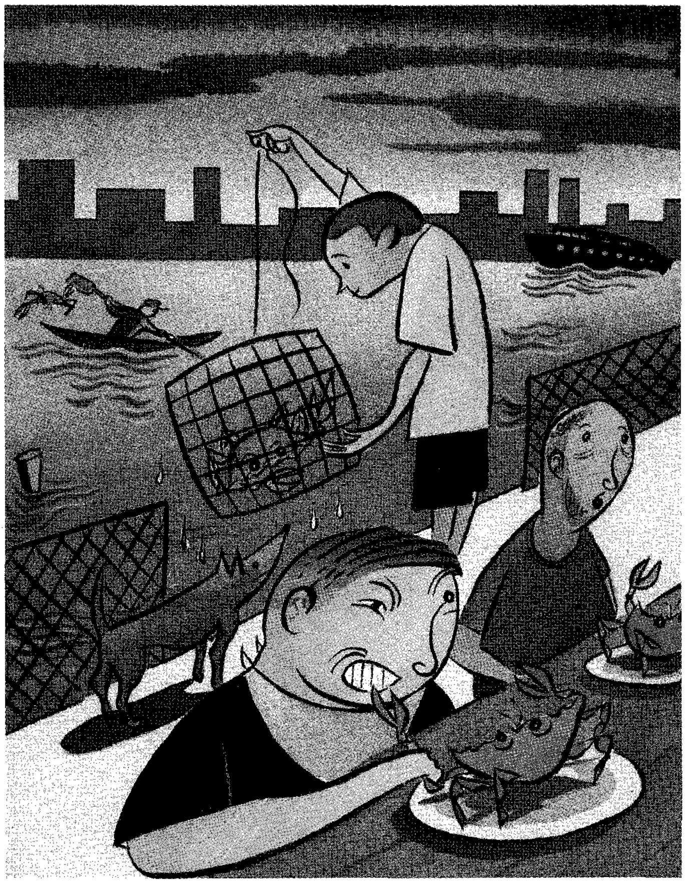
Aug. 17 at 3: The Arianna String Quartet joins a seasoned veteran, the oboist Burt Lucarelli, in a program of Debussy, Shostakovich (the Quartet No. 6 in G Major, as close to sunshine as this composer gets), Bax, and Vaughan Williams ("Household Music," for oboe and strings). ♦ Aug. 24 at 3: The vast experience of John Kochanowski, the founding violist of the late Concord String Quartet (that rare group that seemed to live as much for new music as for the classics), provides an anchor for the Blair String Quartet, an excellent ensemble-in-residence at Vanderbilt University. Amy Dorfman is their guest in Shostakovich's Piano Quintet; quartets by Haydn and Beethoven (the "Serioso") complete the program. (Routes 63 and 126, Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

SOUTH SHORE MUSIC SERIES

Jon Nakamatsu, the 1997 Gold Medalist (and the audience favorite) at the Van Cliburn piano competition, offers a recital of music by Schubert (the Four Impromptus, D. 899), Mendelssohn, and Brahms. (Saugatuck Congregational Church, 245 Post Rd. E., Westport, Conn. 866-776-8745. Aug. 22 at 8.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS

The Shanghai String Quartet, a refined ensemble originally formed at the Shanghai Conservatory twenty years ago, comes to the Maverick's woodland concert hall to perform music by Haydn, Jiang ("China Song"), and Beethoven (the Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op. 127). (Woodstock, N.Y. 845-679-8217. Aug. 24 at 3.)



The Hudson River Foundation and the River Project cook up the Crab Crunch, on August 16.

MARCELLUS HALL

ABOVE AND BEYOND

CRAB CRUNCH

Christopher Letts, a former commercial fisherman and an educator with the Hudson River Foundation, talks about, prepares, and serves *Callinectes sapidus* (that's Latin for "beautiful delicious swimmer," more or less), a.k.a. the blue crab. But these are not just any crabs: they're local invertebrates, right out of the Hudson. Free samples of the sweet white meat will be available. (The River Project, Pier 26, West St. at N. Moore St. 212-233-3030. Aug. 16 from 3 to 6.)

HOWL!

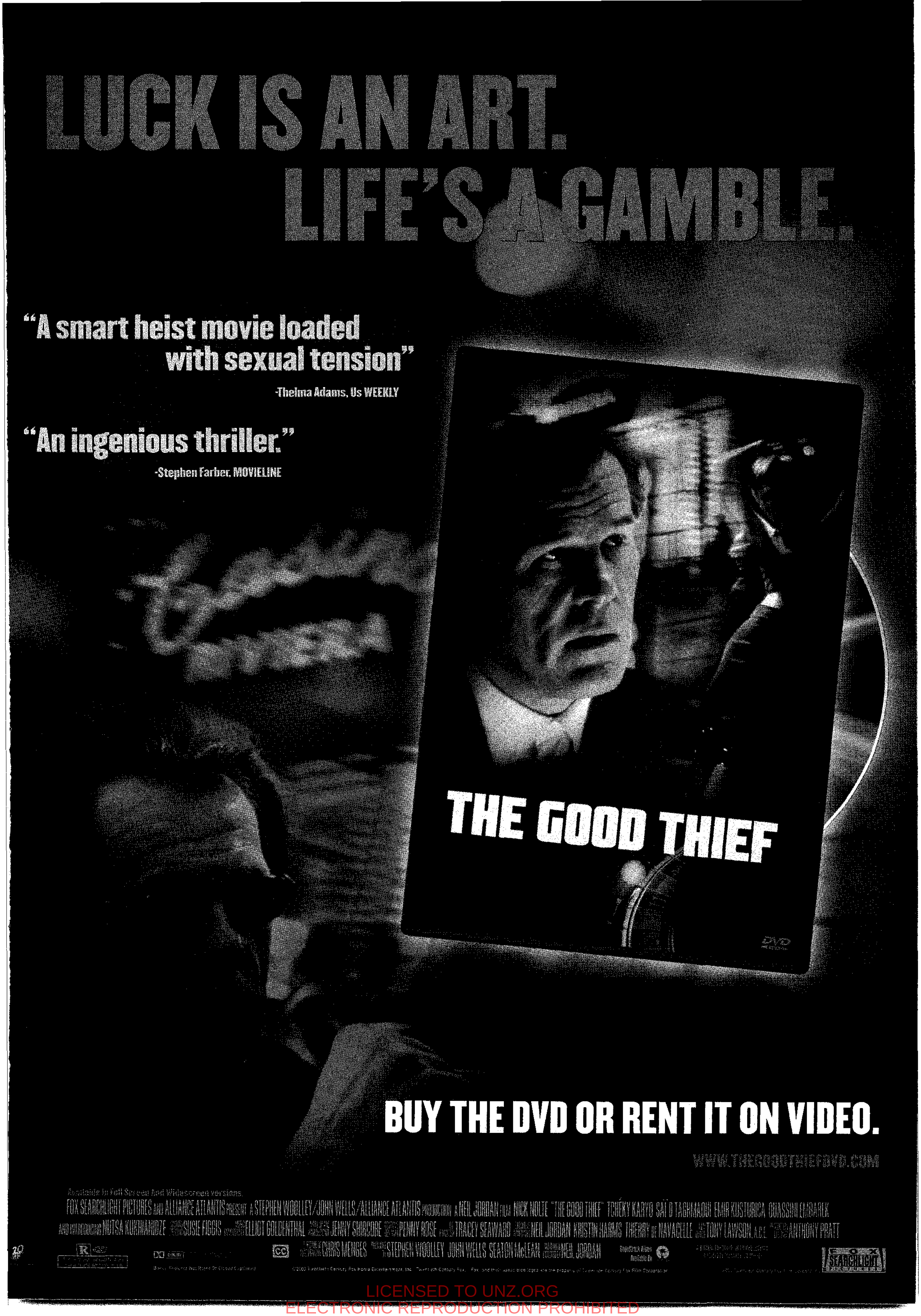
A new downtown music-and-literature festival celebrates the legacy of W. H. Auden, Charlie Parker, Allen Ginsberg, and other noted artists from Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side. The weeklong affair includes readings and performances by the likes of the novelist Jonathan Ames and the poet Robert Creeley, along with film screenings, a bluegrass ball, and tours of local performance artists' kitchens. Highlights include the Charlie Parker Jazz Festival (see Night Life—Concerts) and the return of Wigstock, the late-summer gathering that's a real drag. (Aug. 20-26. For more information, visit www.howlfestival.com.)

READINGS

Aug. 15 at 7:30: The novelists Yann Martel and Julia Glass offer an alfresco reading of their work. (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. For more information, call 212-360-2777.) ♦ Aug. 20 at 7: The science-fiction writers Barry N. Malzberg and Rudy Rucker read from their work. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS

Aug. 17 at 7: The Vietnamese Zen master and poet Thich Nhat Hanh presents a lecture titled "Trusting Our Hearts in the Midst of Uncertainty." (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-307-7171.) The following day at 7, Hanh will be at the Union Square Barnes & Noble for a talk about creating true peace. (33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Aug. 20 at 6: Jon Papernick, Nelly Reifler, Ellen Umansky, and other contributors to "Lost Tribe," a new collection of Jewish fiction, gather to read from their work and discuss literature and religion. (Eldridge Street Synagogue, 12 Eldridge St. 212-219-0888, ext. 205.)



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FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

MOVIES OPENING

AMERICAN SPLENDOR
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Aug. 15.

AUTUMN SPRING
Vlastimil Brodsky plays an ornery old man who fakes his own death, in a comedic drama directed by Vladimír Michálek. Also with Stella Zazvorkova and Stanislav Zindulka. In Czech. Opening Aug. 22. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

THE BATTLE OF SHAKER HEIGHTS
Efram Potelle and Kyle Rankin directed this coming-of-age drama, written by Erica Beeney, about a rebellious teen-age boy (Shia LaBeouf) who is a committed Second World War reënactor. The directors and screenwriter won the Project Greenlight contest. Opening Aug. 22.

CATCHING OUT
A documentary about the new generation of freight-train hoppers, some of whom are young anarchists. Sarah George directed. Opening Aug. 20. (Film Forum.)

DOG DAYS
Ulrich Seidl directed this satirical drama about the dysfunctional lives of people in suburban Vienna. In German. Opening Aug. 22. (Angelika Film Center.)

DON'T TEMPT ME
A devil (Penélope Cruz) and an angel (Victoria Abril) vie for the soul of an unsuccessful boxer, in a comedy directed by Agustín Díaz Yanes. Also with Gael García Bernal and Fanny Ardant. In Spanish. Opening Aug. 22.

DUST
Milcho Manchevski's drama, told in flashbacks, about two brothers in the American West who fall in love with the same woman. With Joseph Fiennes and Adrian Lester. Opening Aug. 22.

FREDDY VS. JASON
The horror-film icons Freddy Krueger and Jason Voorhees do battle on Elm Street, in a film directed by Ronny Yu. Opening Aug. 15.

GRIND
A teen drama in which four friends spend the summer after high school pursuing their dream of becoming professional skateboarders. Opening Aug. 15.

MARCI X
A sheltered young woman (Lisa Kudrow) takes over her father's hip-hop label and tries to discipline its most controversial artist (Damon Wayans), in a comedy directed by Richard Benjamin. Opening Aug. 22.

THE MEDALLION
An action movie with Jackie Chan as a detective endowed with magical powers. Also with Claire Forlani. Opening Aug. 22.

MY BOSS'S DAUGHTER
David Zucker directed this comedy in which a young man (Ashton Kutcher) house-sits for his tyrannical boss (Terence Stamp). With Tara Reid as the daughter. Opening Aug. 22.

OPEN RANGE
A Western directed by Kevin Costner, who plays Charley Waite, a cowboy haunted by his past. Also with Robert Duvall and Annette Bening. Opening Aug. 15.

OT: OUR TOWN
Scott Hamilton Kennedy's documentary follows a production of Thornton Wilder's play put on by the students of a Compton high school. Opening Aug. 15.

RANA'S WEDDING
Hany Abu-Asad directed this drama about a Palestinian girl who wants to marry her boyfriend, not one of the men her father has picked out for her. In Arabic. Opening Aug. 22.

STOKED: THE RISE AND FALL OF GATOR
Helen Stickler's documentary tells the story of the former professional skateboarder Mark (Gator) Rogowski, who is now serving time in prison for murder. Opening Aug. 22.

THIRTEEN
A drama about the fast life styles of a group of Los Angeles teen-agers. Nikki Reed, who co-wrote the screenplay with the director Catherine Hardwicke, plays the most popular girl in school. Also with Holly Hunter and Evan Rachel Wood. Opening Aug. 20.

UPTOWN GIRLS
The spoiled daughter (Brittany Murphy) of a rock legend loses her inheritance and takes a job as a nanny to an uptight and controlling eight-year-old (Dakota Fanning), in a comedy directed by Boaz Yakin. Opening Aug. 15.

VENUS BOYZ
Gabriel Bauer's documentary explores the international community of drag kings, women who dress as, and in some cases become, men. Opening Aug. 22. (Quad Cinema.)

FILM NOTES

AMERICAN WEDDING
After three dates, the "American Pie" franchise has become a dull and familiar affair. Jesse Dylan's lacklustre direction strands the actors in a series of raunchy, stale bachelor-party gags, and the original ensemble cast has been shaved down to the bare minimum. (That should have been a warning.) Of those who chose to return, only the reliable Eugene Levy manages some gifted bits.—*Bruce Diones* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

BAD BOYS II
Action porn. The producer Jerry Bruckheimer and the director Michael Bay's buddy-cop destructo-rama has all the editing beats of a sex film. A few lines of dialogue (delivered, for the most part, with fake enthusiasm by Will Smith and Martin Lawrence) followed by bursting gunfire, theatrical chases, and the inevitable big-bang ending.—*B.D.* (Astor Plaza, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

BUFFALO SOLDIERS
Gregor Jordan's satire is set on an American Army base near Stuttgart, Germany, in the fateful days of 1989. The story unfolds in Supplies, where Specialist Ray Elwood (Joaquin Phoenix) runs a tidy black-market operation that brings him so much cash he is more or less forced to buy a Mercedes. No one stands in his way, until a battle-hardened sergeant (Scott Glenn) and, more dangerously, his nubile daughter (Anna Paquin) show up. The movie is a good, dark laugh, and there is a freakish, armored surrealism to certain scenes, but the picture is less like Robert Altman's "M*A*S*H" than an episode of "The Phil Silvers Show," with a longer running time and a fouler mouth. The real Army shouldn't be too upset over this film, because you can't accuse a movie of disrespecting something that it doesn't know.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/11/03.) (Angelika Film Center, Empire 25, and Lincoln Square.)

CAUGHT IN THE DRAFT
Bob Hope whirls through this little-known 1941 farce with controlled abandon, playing a loud-noise-phobic movie star who woos a colonel's daughter (Dorothy Lamour) to escape the draft, only to wind up in the Army and in love with her. It's both a first-rate service comedy, like "Operation Mad Ball," and a tip-top star vehicle, like "Stripes." Thanks to a combination of bad luck and bravado, that will-o'-the-wisp Hope, his half-wily manager, Lynne Overman, and his naïve chauffeur, Eddie Bracken, keep bouncing off base walls and into K.P. until they finally rebound with a desperate, wisecracking heroism. Hope is marvellous at bringing a banjo-eyed intensity to a character a half-step removed from himself, and the set pieces are a joy, especially a broken-field tank ride that proves how little primitive special effects matter when the human content is hilarious.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade Theatre; Aug. 13.)

DIRTY PRETTY THINGS
The British director Stephen Frears leaves the pop pastures of "High Fidelity" behind and delivers a difficult and resolute movie about illegal immigrants in London. The story has all the elements of film noir—a black marketeer, dingy apartments, prostitution—but the frame is often suffused with a harsh, hospital-white light. Frears and his screenwriter Steve Knight sidestep the standard benchmarks of the immigrant story by shaping their material as a moral thriller. The actor Chiwetel Ejiofor delivers a brilliant performance as Okwe, a Nigerian man who gets involved with some bloody subterfuge at the posh hotel where he works. Audrey Tautou, the über-gamine, is less convincing as a Turkish runaway, but she's still likable, and Frears tips the action into motion so gracefully that you almost don't notice the characters' fates aligning against each other. He also doesn't flinch from the portrayal of some ugly moments; the somewhat pat romantic justice of the ending comes as a welcome relief.—*Michael Agger* (BAM Rose Cinemas, Cinema 2, Lincoln Square, and Sunshine Cinema.)

LE DIVORCE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Paris and Union Square.)

GIGLI
Jennifer Lopez is Ricki, a sweet-voiced lesbian hit man; Ben Affleck is Gigli, the Mob employee who desires her and wishes she would hop the fence. Together, they watch over a kidnapped mentally challenged boy. It's hard to tell who this movie was intended for: those who think that a mentally challenged boy singing dirty rap lyrics is cute and funny? Those who find Ben Affleck's brow to be ineffably mysterious? Students of Stoic philosophy looking for a test? Connoisseurs of moments of jaw-dropping celebrity narcissism will thrill to J. Lo's extended soliloquy of how man's truth, beauty, and inspiration all find their source in her nether region. The movie also features one of the most tone-deaf "I love her" moments in the history of romantic drama—it's funny how you don't really know someone until you deposit her suicidal girlfriend at the E.R. Finally, in what must be a coded audience message from the props department, look for the frequent appearances of "Being Peace," a Buddhist book that asks, "Have we wasted our hours and days? Are we wasting our lives?"—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE HIDDEN FORTRESS
This sublime Japanese medieval entertainment, released in 1958, renders a comedy of ethical equilibrium as a giant sixteenth-century civil-war epic. At the center is a righteous, ornery princess in disguise, piercing enemy lines to seek sanctuary in a friendly province, and a valiant, no-nonsense general (Toshiro Mifune), who sacrifices his own sister to protect her. But Akira Kurosawa tells the story from the perspective of two peasant helpers who hope only for a piece of her dynastic treasure and can't even be trusted with her real identity. (George Lucas has acknowledged these antiheroes as the inspiration for R2-D2 and C-3PO in "Star Wars.") Using wide-screen for the first time, Kurosawa turns his sprawling frames into kinetic tapestries of anarchy. His chases and duels boast the oversized choreography and ruthless movements that would influence Leone and Peckinpah. It's Mifune's most gloriously uncomplicated performance—in repose his conscience may haunt him, but in battle he rouses the innocent fervor of Fairbanks or Flynn at their best. In Japanese.—*M.S.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Aug. 15-16.)

HIGH AND LOW
Akira Kurosawa's 1963 *policier,* based on Ed McBain's "King's Ransom," transcends its genre and

premise and becomes an Olympian urban action movie. A principled shoe executive (Toshiro Mifune) is about to use his borrowings and savings to take over the business when he's told that his son has been kidnapped. The real victim turns out to be his chauffeur's son, but Mifune pays the ransom anyway, knowing that competing executives will force him out of the company. From the opening arguments over shoes—Mifune wants to make them sturdy, his peers want to make them cheap—Kurosawa imbues this picture with a fiery disdain for moral shoddiness. The first section is largely confined to Mifune's hilltop house, but Kurosawa charges every corner of it with tension, as Mifune's associates and the police crowd in on him and the kidnappers use binoculars to spy on his actions. In the second section, the director slashes through the claustrophobia with great horizontal strokes as the police inspector (the dynamic young Tatsuya Nakadai) helps Mifune deliver the ransom on the bullet train and then commands his task force on a headlong manhunt. In the third and most impressionistic section, the kidnapper leads the cops on a harrowing tour of dope-riddled after-hours Japan. This is one street Eastern that takes the audience, as the original title promised, from "Heaven to Hell." In Japanese.—*M.S.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Aug. 13-14.)

THE HOUSEKEEPER
A pretty and pliant young woman (Émilie Dequenne) signs on as a housekeeper with a dyspeptic middle-aged Parisian sound engineer (Jean-Pierre Bacri) whose wife has left him; she not only takes over her employer's mop and broom, she takes over his bed. Claude Berri's film, from a novel by Christian Oster, is a study in limited consciousness. The man, we realize, is a bit of a sourpuss, the girl rather bovine and undiscriminating. But when they move to the coast of Brittany for a vacation, she becomes a lot less pliant. Berri keeps the story small-scaled, tart, and closely observed. The movie doesn't have the emotional range or the cruelty of a work of art, but everything in it feels right. In French.—*David Denby* (7/28/03) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

JOHNNY GUITAR
In Jean-Luc Godard's "Pierrot le Fou," the hero allows his maid to go to the movies three times in one week because Nicholas Ray's "Johnny Guitar" is playing: "It's good she's getting the right education," he informs his wife. For the rest of us, Ray's baroque, haywire "adult" Western is good for a laugh. Erotic tension and angst, circa 1954, invade the Old Arizona landscapes, and the mixture makes the movie spectacularly incongruous and funny. Joan Crawford stars as Vienna, the owner of a frontier casino bar. She wants the railroad to cut through the territory of the bad guys—a gang of range-riding plutocrats. But the true reason for all the movie's rampaging is that Emma (Mercedes McCambridge), the local Ms. Big, is a sexually repressed banker who's jealous of Vienna's animal magnetism. Ray's barrelling pace—and his penchant for pulp words and pop icons—must have been what impressed Godard. Even Crawford's leading men have gaudy monikers: Sterling Hayden is Johnny Guitar and Scott Brady is the Dancin' Kid.—*M.S.* (Film Forum; Aug. 15-21.)

THE MAGDALENE SISTERS
The Asylums were an Irish institution for wayward females, run by the Sisters of Mercy. The director, Peter Mullan, concentrates on a trio of girls who meet at a particular, though fictional, asylum. There is Margaret (Anne-Marie Duff), who was raped at a wedding reception, Rose (Dorothy Duffy), who gave birth to an illegitimate child, and Bernadette (Nora-Jane Noone), the rudest and loveliest of the three. Her grievance cuts deepest, for her fate is decided by the looks that she darts at the boys who hang around her school playground. That Mullan will bend all his considerable energy to a lashing of the Catholic Church is clear from our first view of Sister Bridget (Geraldine McEwan), whose finger, encased in a rubber thimble, is seen counting out her money. (And nobody does shrewishness better than McEwan.) The question arises: can a film so convinced of its need to condemn avoid a similar hardening of heart? Thankfully, Mullan's young actresses survive his sometimes unpleasant zealotry on the strength

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of their grace and good temper.—*A.L.* (8/11/03) (Cinema 1, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

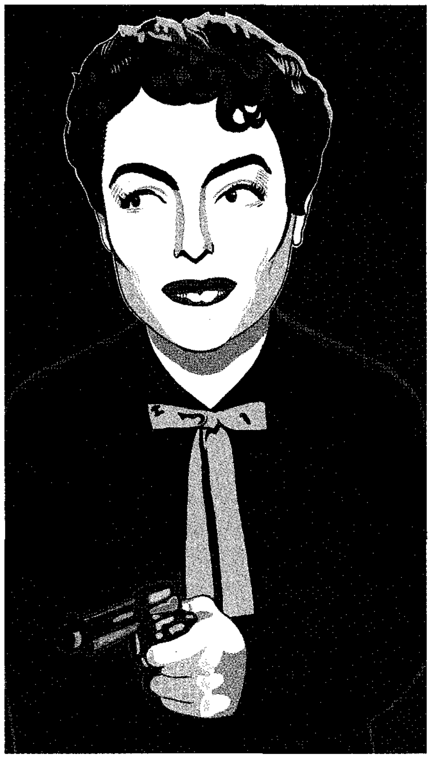
MONDAYS IN THE SUN
The magnificent Javier Bardem stars in this film about a group of unemployed friends and the laconic lives they lead in northern Spain. There's a broken spirit to this movie that the actor taps into—he's heavy and slack and bitterly humorous. The director Fernando León de Aranoa conveys the texture of slow-motion existence, and the cast around Bardem inhabit their idle fates with an affecting ease. In Spanish.—*B.D.* (New York Twin.)

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL
As the deposed pirate captain Jack Sparrow, Johnny Depp does not so much walk as sashay into a scene, and he wears more eyeshadow than Tammy Faye Bakker. He gives this exuberant family entertainment an amiable sheen of silliness (the performance offers diverse echoes of W. C. Fields, Toshiro Mifune, and Keith Richards on a bender). Depp leaves a lot of the duelling and all of the lovemaking to Orlando Bloom (from "The Lord of the Rings"), who plays a young blacksmith with pirate blood in his veins, a fellow much loved by the daughter of the British governor of a Caribbean colony, Keira Knightley (she has a thing for swashbucklers). The movie is based on the famous old Disneyland ride, and it's good, cheesy fun, complete with tall ships, battles at sea, and accursed pirates who turn into skeletons at night. As Barbossa, the pirate who deposed Captain Jack, Geoffrey Rush eyeballs his victims and stretches out his syllables in the taunting manner of Robert Newton, who specialized in stump-legged scoundrels fifty years ago.—*D.D.* (7/28/03) (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

SEABISCUIT
Gary Ross's adaptation of Laura Hillenbrand's 2001 best-seller about the miraculous racehorse of the nineteen-thirties has been shaped as a national epic—not as a good story but as *the* good story. The horse, knobby-kneed and perverse, comes from behind and knocks off the more famous Thoroughbreds of the era. He is saved from obscurity by an unlikely trio: Charles Howard (Jeff Bridges), a millionaire auto salesman with a venturesome streak; Tom Smith (Chris Cooper), a down-and-out trainer, practically a relic of the nineteenth century; and Johnny (Red) Pollard (Tobey Maguire), an embittered, not terribly talented boxer and jockey. The horse becomes such a popular favorite that, as Hillenbrand and Ross tell it, he redeems the millions of unemployed "forgotten men" in the Depression. In case we don't get the point, there are solemn interludes of photomontage accompanied by narration from the historian David McCullough. The Oscar-hungry movie stamps itself with a seal of approval rather than simply telling its story. Much of it, however, is beautifully made in conservative-humanist style, and the races are thrilling. With William H. Macy in a great bit as a poetizing radio announcer.—*D.D.* (8/4/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Beekman, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE SECRET LIVES OF DENTISTS
In Alan Rudolph's marital drama, a suburban dentist (Campbell Scott) who shares his practice with his wife (Hope Davis) suspects her of having an affair. Scott's character is a model of repression—he doesn't want to know anything about his wife's infidelity that would cause him to act—and the film plays out as a maddening rush of imaginary fantasies (the writer Craig Lucas invests his script with more than a few comic moments to goose the inaction along). The outstanding performances of the two leads do much to tether Rudolph's loose style. The film is steeped in a queasy emotional containment that nails the experience of true domestic dread.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and 72nd Street East.)

STEP INTO LIQUID
A clever name for a classic surfing documentary. Dana Brown's movie has the exotic locations, breezy narration, uplifting stories, and cracked surfer wisdom you expect from the genre. What sets the movie apart is the astonishing sequence that ends it, in which a team of surfers use Jet Skis to catch the sixty-foot waves they find in the middle of the ocean. Other notable interludes include the guys who surf the freezing, muddy waters of Lake Michigan and the professional women surfers who test their mettle at Tahiti's Teahupo'o, dubbed "the wave with teeth" because it breaks over a shallow coral reef.—*M.A.* (Angelika Film Center.)


At Film Forum, Joan Crawford in Nicholas Ray's "Johnny Guitar."

SWIMMING POOL
Charlotte Rampling gives another outstanding performance, this time as an uptight mystery writer who accepts an offer from her publisher to use his house in the South of France for some inspiration. When his sexy daughter (the luscious Ludivine Sagnier) shows up uninvited, a slow-burning and deliberately abstract mystery is set in motion. The director François Ozon (who's worked with Rampling before, in the very similar "Under the Sand") crafts a seductive puzzle that may have audiences wondering, in a pleasant way, what it was that they have just seen. In French and English.—*B.D.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Sunshine Cinema.)

28 DAYS LATER
Another helpful development for the British Tourist Board. Danny Boyle's horror film, alternately savage and glum, shows London—and, by implication, most of England—destroyed by a fast-acting plague. Borne in the blood, it passes from one Brit to another with a single bite; soon, the capital is empty save for marauding zombies, leaving the unchewed—such as Jim (Cillian Murphy) and Selena (Naomie Harris)—to drift around, shop without paying, and never quite have sex. Any resemblance to normal teen-age behavior is entirely coincidental. Brendan Gleeson, much the best and cheeriest thing in the movie, plays a taxi-driver who helps them to leave town; from here on, Boyle and his screenwriter, Alex Garland, run out of gas. The picture is twitchy and annoying, flecked with blood and half-digested ideas, and too much is left unexplained. As a scheme for solving central London's traffic problem, though, it is unlikely to be surpassed.—*A.L.* (6/30/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

CAMP
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.

FINDING NEMO (6/9/03)
Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.

FREAKY FRIDAY
Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.

MASKED AND ANONYMOUS
Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.

SPY KIDS 3-D: GAME OVER
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, and 34th Street Theatre.

TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES (7/14 & 21/03)
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Sept. 7: "Eyes Wide Open: The Evolution of Widescreen Cinema." Aug. 16 at 2: "West Side Story" (1961, Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise). ♦ Aug. 16 at 4:45: "Point Blank" (1967, John Boorman). ♦ Aug. 17 at 1: "Kwaidan" (1964, Masaki Kobayashi; in Japanese). ♦ Aug. 17 at 4: "The Por-

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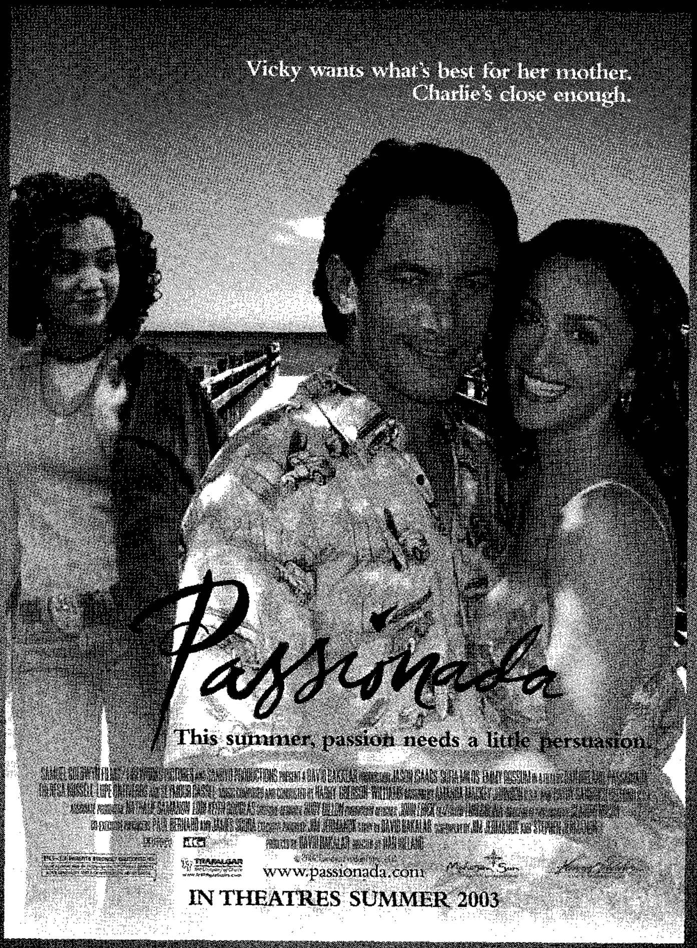
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nographers" (1966, Shohei Imamura; in Japanese). ♦ Aug. 23 at 2: "Tokyo Olympiad" (1965, Kon Ichikawa; in Japanese). ♦ Aug. 24 at 2: "Grand Prix" (1966, John Frankenheimer). ♦ Repertory nights. Aug. 15-17 at 6:30: "Pierrot le Fou" (1965, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ Aug. 23-24 at 6:30: "The Lady from Shanghai" (1948, Orson Welles).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Through Aug. 29: "The Return of Kurosawa and Mifune." All films are in Japanese. Aug. 13 at 4:30 and 7:30 and Aug. 14 at 5 and 8: "High and Low" (†). ♦ Aug. 15-16 at 2, 5, and 8: "The Hidden Fortress" (†). ♦ Aug. 17 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10 and Aug. 18 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Rashomon" (1950). ♦ Aug. 19 and Aug. 21 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Sanjuro" (1962). ♦ Aug. 25-26 at 5 and 8: "The Bad Sleep Well" (1960).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Aug. 13-14 at 1:20, 3:50, 6:30, and 9:10: "Chinatown" (1974, Roman Polanski). ♦ Aug. 15-21 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "Johnny Guitar" (†). ♦ Aug. 22-23 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: "The Adventures of Robin Hood" (1938, William Keighley and Michael Curtiz).

GRAMERCY THEATRE

127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through Aug. 17: A Dorothy Arzner retrospective. Aug. 14 at 4: "Craig's Wife" (1936). ♦ Aug. 14 at 6: "Sarah and Son" (1930). ♦ Aug. 14 at 7:45: "Paramount on Parade" (1930). ♦ Aug. 15 at 6: "Anybody's Woman" (1930). ♦ Aug. 15 at 8: "The Bride Wore Red" (1937). ♦ Aug. 16 at 1: "Dance, Girl, Dance" (1940). ♦ Aug. 16 at 3: "First Comes Courage" (1943). ♦ Aug. 17 at 2: "Nana" (1934). ♦ Aug. 17 at 4: "Merrily We Go to Hell" (1932). ♦ Summer repertory classics. Aug. 14 at 2 and Aug. 17 at 5:45: "Dead of Night" (1945, Alberto Cavalcanti et al.). ♦ Aug. 15 at 2 and Aug. 18 at 8: "The Connection" (1961, Shirley Clarke). ♦ Aug. 15 at 4:15: "The Killing" (1956, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Aug. 16 at 6: "The Purple Rose of Cairo" (1985, Woody Allen). ♦ Aug. 16 at 8: "Million Dollar Legs" (1932, Edward F. Cline). ♦ Aug. 18 at 6: "Mamma Roma" (1962, Pier Paolo Pasolini; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 21 at 3 and Aug. 22 at 7:45: "The Red Tapes" (1976, Vito Acconci). ♦ Aug. 21 at 6: "Everglades City" (1985, Matthew Geller). ♦ Aug. 21 at 8 and Aug. 24 at 4: "Blind Chance" (1982, Krzysztof Kieslowski; in Polish). ♦ Aug. 22 at 2: "The Straight Story" (1999, David Lynch). ♦ Aug. 22 at 4: "Double Lunar Dogs" (1984, Joan Jonas) and "Incidence of Catastrophe" (1987, Gary Hill). ♦ Aug. 22 at 6: "Virtual Play: The Double Direct Monkey Wrench in Black's Machinery" (1984, Steve Fagin). ♦ Aug. 23 at 1 and Aug. 25 at 8:15: "The Terrorizer" (1986, Edward Yang; in Mandarin). ♦ Aug. 23 at 3:30: "Das Boot" (1982, Wolfgang Petersen; in German). ♦ Aug. 22 at 6: "I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like" (1986, Bill Viola). ♦ Aug. 23 at 7:45 and Aug. 25 at 6: "The Diary of Mr. N. (1938-67)" (1990, Peter Forgacs; in Hungarian). ♦ Aug. 24 at 2: "Whity" (1971, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German). ♦ Aug. 24 at 6:15: "Silence Is Golden/Man About Town" (1947, René Clair; in French).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

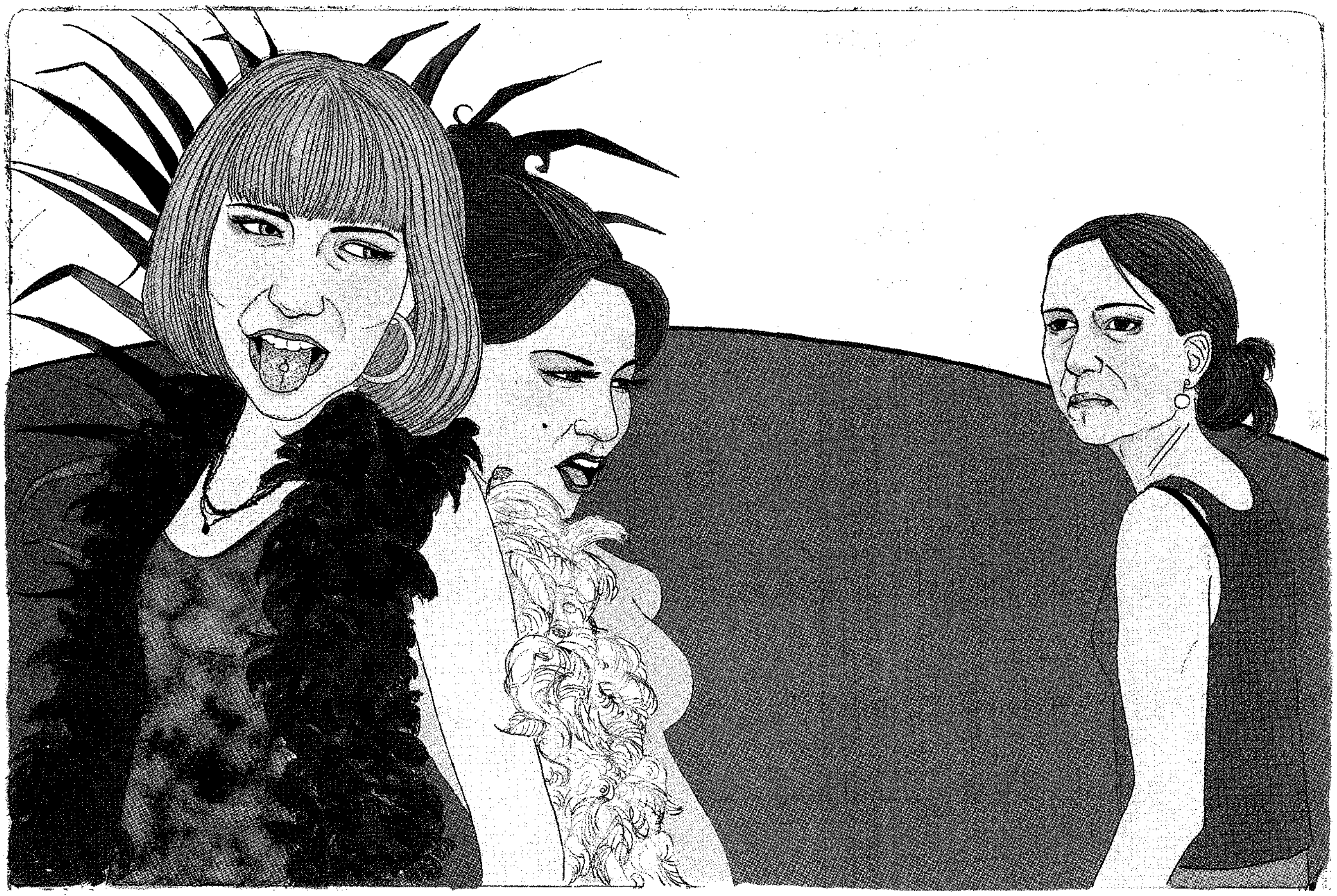
139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. Aug. 15-16: "Pink Floyd—The Wall" (1982, Alan Parker). ♦ Aug. 22-23: "The Warriors" (1979, Walter Hill).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Through Aug. 31: "Classic Thalia from the Kino International Collection." Aug. 15 at 7 and Aug. 16 at 2: "My Name Is Ivan" (1962, Andrei Tarkovsky; in Russian). ♦ Aug. 15 at 8:45 and Aug. 16 at 3:45: "The Tin Drum" (1979, Volker Schlöndorff; in German). ♦ Aug. 16 at 7 and Aug. 17 at 2: "Il Grido" (1957, Michelangelo Antonioni; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 16 at 9:15 and Aug. 17 at 4:15: "Hawks and Sparrows" (1966, Pier Paolo Pasolini; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 17 at 6:30: "Diary of a Country Priest" (1950, Robert Bresson; in French). ♦ Aug. 17 at 8:45: "Mother Joan of the Angels" (1961, Jerzy Kawalerowicz; in Polish). ♦ Aug. 22 at 6 and Aug. 23 at 1:30: "Marius" (1931, Alexander Korda; in French). ♦ Aug. 22 at 8:15 and Aug. 23 at 3:45: "Fanny" (1932, Marc Allegret; in French). ♦ Aug. 23 at 6:45 and Aug. 24 at 2: "César" (1936, Marcel Pagnol; in French). ♦ Aug. 23 at 9 and Aug. 24 at 4:15: "The Baker's Wife" (1938, Pagnol; in French). ♦ Aug. 24 at 7: "Un Chien Andalou" (1929, Luis Buñuel; in French) and "Land Without Bread" (1932, Buñuel; in French). ♦ Aug. 24 at 8: "Stromboli" (1949, Roberto Rossellini; in Italian).

WALTER READE THEATRE

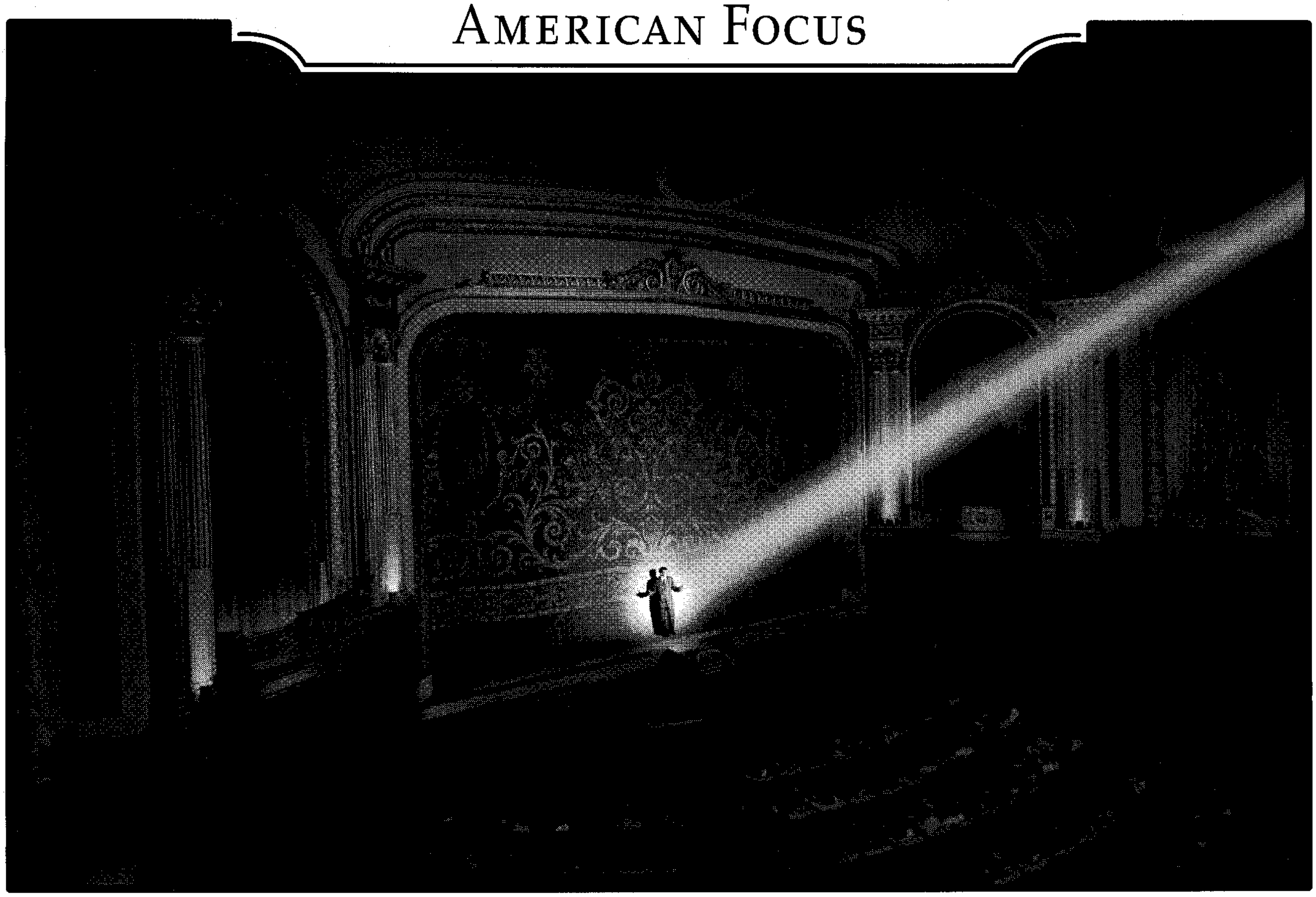
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Aug. 14: A tribute to Bob Hope. Aug. 13 at 1 and 6:15 and Aug. 14 at 3:15: "The Facts of Life" (1960, Melvin Frank). ♦ Aug. 13 at 3:15 and 8:30: "Caught in the Draft" (†). ♦ Aug. 14 at 1 and 9: "Beau James" (1957, Melville Shavelson). ♦ Starting Aug. 15: "The Whole Wide World: Fifty Years of Widescreen Moviemaking." Aug. 15 at 3 and 7 and Aug. 18 at 3 and 6:45: "Bitter Victory" (1957, Nicholas Ray). ♦ Aug. 15 at 5 and 9 and Aug. 18 at 4:45 and 8:30: "Bigger Than Life" (1956, Ray). ♦ Aug. 16 at 1 and 6 and Aug. 19 at 3:45: "Forty Guns" (1957, Samuel Fuller). ♦ Aug. 16 at 3:15 and 8:15 and Aug. 19 at 1: "Satyricon" (1970, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 17 at 2 and 8:30: "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Aug. 17 at 4:45: "Spartacus" (1960, Kubrick). ♦ Aug. 20 at 2 and 6:20 and Aug. 21 at 4 and 8:30: "The Innocents" (1960, Jack Clayton). ♦ Aug. 20 at 4 and 8:30 and Aug. 21 at 2 and 6:30: "Those Are the Damned" (1962, Joseph Losey). ♦ Aug. 22 at 2 and 8 and Aug. 24 at 4:45: "The Thin Red Line" (1999, Terence Malick). ♦ Aug. 22 at 5:15 and Aug. 24 at 2 and 8: "The Long Gray Line" (1955, John Ford). ♦ Aug. 23 at 2 and 8:15 and Aug. 25 at 4: "Carlito's Way" (1993, Brian De Palma). ♦ Aug. 23 at 5:15 and Aug. 25 at 1: "Aliens" (1986, James Cameron). ♦ Aug. 25 at 7:15: "Once Upon a Time in the West" (1969, Sergio Leone). ♦ Aug. 26 at 1: "Pierrot le Fou" (1965, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ Aug. 26 at 3:15: "McCabe and Mrs. Miller" (1971, Robert Altman).



Evan Rachel Wood, Nikki Reed, and Holly Hunter in "Thirteen," a teen-rebellion drama set in L.A., opening August 20.

LARA TOMLIN

AMERICAN FOCUS



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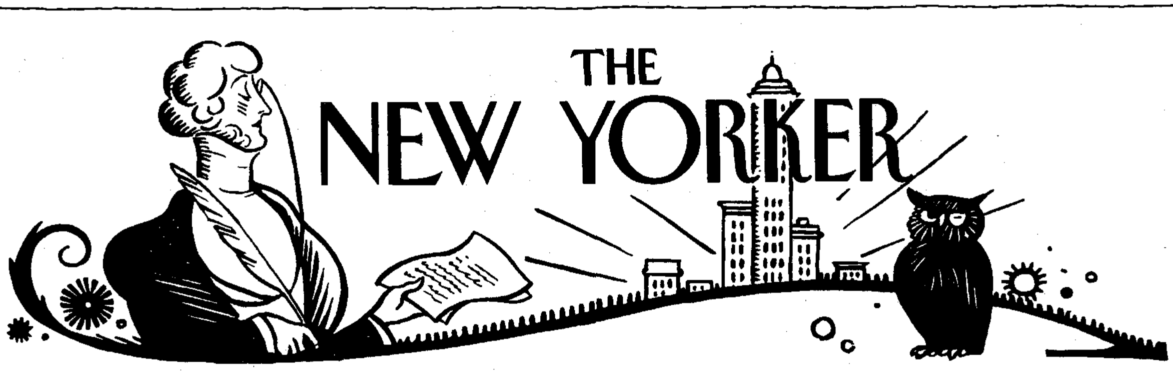
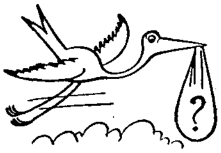


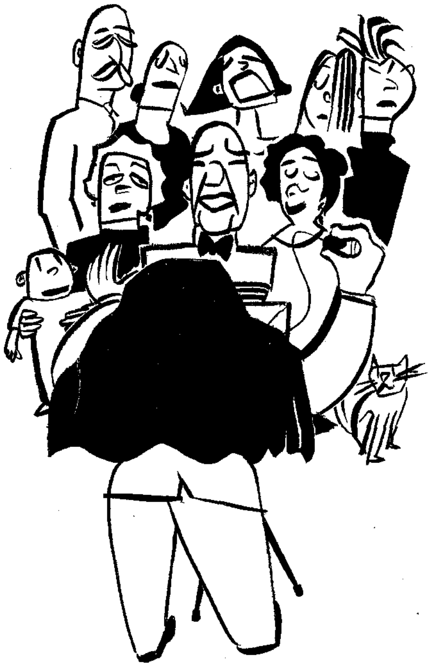
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE FAMILY ISSUE



"We are fam-ilee," the great old Sister Sledge single went, and then the 1979 Pittsburgh Pirates swiped it and made it their own, riding that beat all the way into the World Series and winning with it, of course. Who doesn't want to be fam-ilee? Families aren't on our minds as much as they used to be, perhaps, but let's start counting, top of our heads. There is mine and yours and also the Kennedys and the Cosbys, the Cabots, the Bushes, the bin Ladens, the Roosevelts, the Alous, the Osbournes, the Barrymores, the Brontës, the Marx Brothers, the Jameses (William and Henry), and the Jameses (Jesse and Frank). Also the Jeffersons, the Gambinos, the Medicis, the Adamses, and the Addamses. The Guermantes. The Bachs, the Kallikaks, the Windsors, the Wallendas. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., and Jr.; Sherlock and Mycroft Holmes. Saltonstalls and Pallisers, Fondas and Stuarts. The Dorsey Brothers and the brothers Duchamp (Marcel), Duchamp-Villon (Raymond), and Villon (Jacques). The Andrettis and the Pettys and the Earnhardts. The Bobbseys, the Romanoffs, and *die* Strausses Johann the Elder, Johann the Younger, Richard, and Levi. The Capets and the Capulets and, yes, the Carters. Jimmy and Rosalynn and Amy and Billy Carter; A. P., June, Maybelle, Helen, and Anita Carter; Gary Carter. Andrew Jackson. Michael, Jermaine, Jackie, Marlon, Tito, La Toya, and Janet Jackson. Stonewall Jackson. Reggie Jackson. Donald Duck; Huey, Dewey & Louie Duck. The Sopranos.

Some of these families are made up, some real; the difference keeps blurring or fading, thanks to the comix-book elasticity, the animating weirdness, of our own families now, and our appetite for scholarly or randy disclosure about the famous dead. Everyday American life, arriving by NPR or CNN on a bad morning, takes on dreamlike strangeness. "This can't be true," we cry, and then, in a murmur, "You wish." It dawns on us also that our own reliable family memories are probably being reshaped, day by day, to meet some private need. A memoir of mine about my father, published here three years ago, brought unexpected reactions from others in the family: "Oh, no," I heard. "He wasn't like that at all. Not with me."



This double issue of *The New Yorker* is a mixture of memoir and reporting about families; a prior family issue, just over a year ago, was mostly fiction. It's a surprise when you think of it, but most of the extended family portraits in this magazine have come from fiction writers—William Maxwell, Jhumpa Lahiri, John Cheever (his 1951 story "Goodbye, My Brother" inflicts a fresh bruise on each rereading), Alice Munro, Harold Brodkey, Lorrie Moore, John Updike, among others—and from poets like Philip Levine and Sharon Olds and Donald Hall. Maxwell and Updike have told their family stories again and again, musing and elaborating and rethinking—the way we all do, surely, in middle-of-the-night replay. Roz Chast and Edward Koren are ziggedy family artists, and Vladimir Nabokov, John Seabrook, and Francine du Plessix Gray eloquent archivists. Donald Antrim's family story has been emerging as memoir and Jonathan Franzen's mainly as extended fiction; it could have been the other way around.

But fiction has limits; reporting does

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

better with the outlandish. In one true-life family story I know, there have been ten (or sixteen, counting another way) divorces, spread across three generations—more than enough for a soap, and not what its members would have invented for themselves as children. But they cannot now unimagine the new fathers and step-uncles and half brothers or sisters and half grandnieces that sit around the family table on a Thanksgiving, or wish a life for themselves that did not include unexpected attachments and surprises. In this story, a man comes up to a friend he has known for forty years and says, "Guess what. We have the same father—I'm your brother. No wonder I could always beat you at singles." On another day, a new baby, a wonderful son, is baptized simultaneously in ten or eleven different rites, including the Yoruba. Four years later, the friend who thought of this caper, a minister, and pulled it off, is killed in a homophobic murder. Years after this, a blond granddaughter acquires a coffee-colored sister, from Colombia. Much later, a niece writes a daring master's thesis about recent research into the terrible disease ALS, and its inexorable progress in one particular victim, her mother. Back to the fall of 1944, when a stepfather sits down in his West Eleventh Street apartment and resumes the abandoned draft of his first children's book, tentatively called "Stuart Little." More recently, a pair of middle-aged half brothers smile as they agree that they have never found a way to express the love they have for each other; now the survivor, sailing over the bit of Jericho Bay where his brother's ashes were gently sunk, feels that they did close the gap after all.

This is my own family. Amazingly, I am its patriarch—though only one of us, a nephew, seems to see me that way, thank God. My attachments and affections within it run every which way: leaping from my children and grandchildren to my divorced and deceased first wife's nearest sister, whom I've known for sixty-five years ("Of course I live in denial," she says. "It's the perfect place for me"); to a different ex-sister-in-law, who's a judge in California; to a long-gone bluestocking aunt wounded on the Western Front in 1918, where she'd ventured as a correspondent for *The New Republic;* to a niece, the single mother of two grown sons, who's an intensive-care nurse in Vermont and trains enormous jumping horses in her off time; and to all and each (well, just about) in between. I'm not sure these are the "family values" that President Bush keeps talking about, but then again he's always had a little trouble with the language. Let's say they are. We are fam-ilee.

—*Roger Angell*

THE STUMP
IMPRESSIONS OF GORE

The will-he-or-won't-he follies reached fever pitch last week, and amid the chaos and comedy of this season's incipient and aborted political candidacies—Gary Coleman, in; Jerry Springer, out; Larry Flynt, likely; Arnold Schwarzenegger, Hasta la vista, Gray Davis—it was perhaps easier to take seriously the call by the former New York governor Mario Cuomo for Al Gore to change his mind and enter the Presidential race. No matter that Cuomo, with his past equivocations, was an unlikely prod, or that Gore's spokesman had repeatedly denied that the former Vice-President would run again; Cuomo's plea arrived on the eve of a speech that Gore had personally requested the opportunity to deliver, and after a week of growing concern among Democrats that the front-runner, Howard Dean, is unelectable. What could be more perfect, now that Dean had demonstrated the previously untapped power of the Web as a fund-raising tool, than a revived campaign by the man who invented the Internet?

At 10 A.M. on Thursday, several hundred members of the liberal organization MoveOn filed in to the fourth floor auditorium at N.Y.U.'s Kimmel Center, on Washington Square, to hear Gore speak. They wore T-shirts with slogans such as "Liberal" and "Unfuzzy Math (Gore: 50,996,116; Bush: 50,456,169)." Gore's appearance, scheduled for eleven o'clock, would mark his first major public address since last September, when he was greeted by the Commonwealth Club, in San Francisco, with an impromptu a-cappella rendering of "Hail to the Chief"—and then delivered what was widely thought to be a disastrous speech. The pundits were invariably brutal—"self-contradictory pushmipullyu" (William Safire); "a pudding with no theme but much poison" (Charles Krauthammer)—and within a couple of months Gore had withdrawn from contention.

In the back of the auditorium, as the seats filled up, a group of mostly conservative reporters talked among themselves.

"So is this the center of the liberal universe?" one asked.

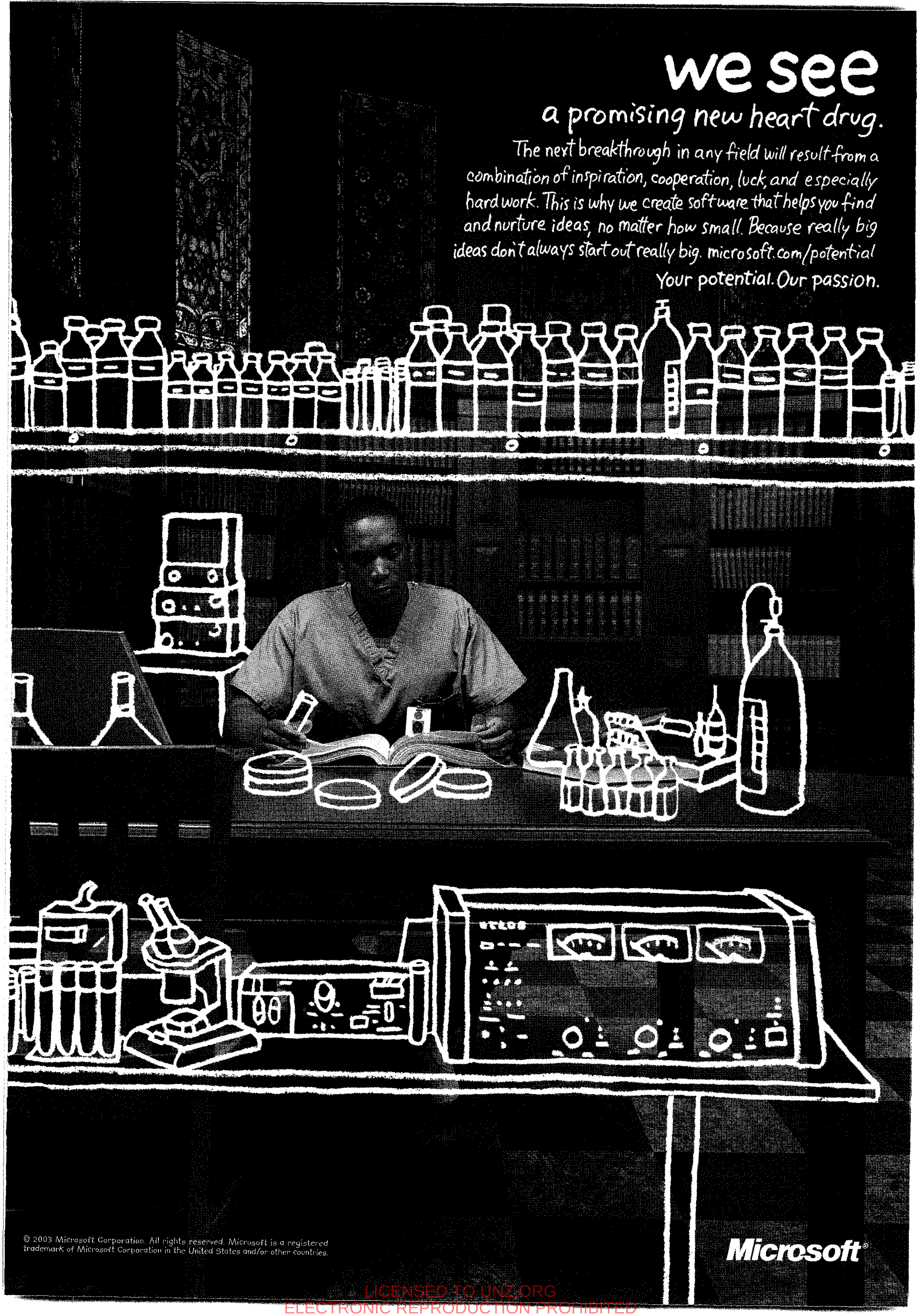
"I don't know, I usually think more of Columbia," another replied. They took turns speculating about what clues they'd soon be called upon to interpret. Beard or no beard? Earth tones or dark suit? Fat or thin?

At about quarter after eleven, following a brief introduction from the president of the N.Y.U. College Democrats ("This really is the peak of a tremendous year we've had. We started a community-service initiative . . ."), Gore sauntered into view from stage right, to a standing ovation. He was dressed in a dark pin-striped suit, with a red-and-blue tie, and was clean-shaven and medium-big. His hair appeared grayer, as he stepped behind the lectern and silenced the crowd with an outstretched right arm. Behind him, spread across the stage, were twelve meticulously arranged American flags. The overall effect was Presidential, or, at least, aspirational.

This time, Gore explained, he had a coherent theme: the Bush Administration had subjected the American people to a consistent pattern of "false impressions." He counted them off, holding up fingers to identify each one. He started with the justifications for the war—the purported connections between Saddam Hussein and September 11th, Al Qaeda, W.M.D. (chemical and nuclear)—then moved on to the aftermath.

"Number Five: Our G.I.s would be welcomed with open arms by cheering Iraqis"—laughter in the audience—"who would help them quickly establish public safety, free markets, and representative democracy."

"Number Six: Even though the rest



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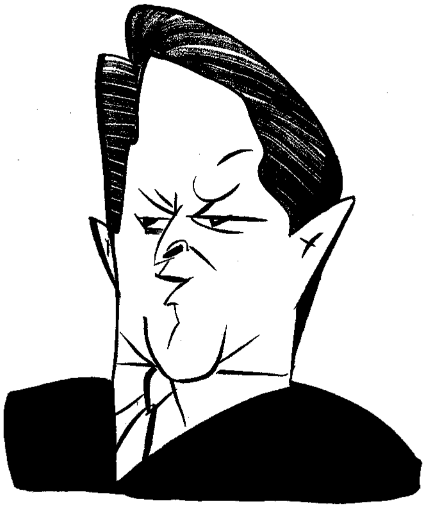
of the world was mostly opposed to the war"—he was smirking here—"they would quickly fall in line after we won and then contribute lots of money and soldiers to help out." More laughter.

Next, he addressed the economy. "At first, I thought maybe the President's advisers were a big part of the problem," he said. "But now, a year later, we still have the same bad economic policies. . . . And I've just about concluded that the real problem may be the President himself"—standing ovation—"and that next year we ought to fire him and get a new one."

A false impression that he failed to mention was the one created by the spectacle at hand—the flags, the suit, the stately delivery matched with the folksy message. "For eight years," he said, in his best whistle-stop baritone, "the Clinton-Gore Administration gave this nation honest budget numbers, an economic plan with integrity that rescued the nation from debt and stagnation, honest advocacy for the environment." It sounded suspiciously like a record to run on. But then he said, "I am proud that my party has candidates for President committed to those values. . . . I am not going to join them, but later in the political cycle I will endorse one of them." So Gore was out.



Al Gore

After he left, a man wearing a "Wesley Clark '04" T-shirt began distributing "Draft Wesley Clark" business cards. Clark, the former NATO commander, has not even declared a party affiliation, but the cards identified him as "socially progressive." "I'd say it's ninety per cent," the man said. "I've heard he's all for it, and so is his son, but his wife still has doubts." Outside on LaGuardia Place, as guests wandered off, a half-dozen people held blue-and-white placards that read, "Clark '04." Will he or won't he?

—*Ben McGrath*

ON THE LINE
A COMER

If you spent an evening at the restaurant Aureole a year or two ago, you might have found, slipped in with the dainty bag of cookies you were given as you left, a little card printed with a phone number and the name "Jason Lepes." You might naturally have assumed that Jason Lepes was a chef at Aureole—perhaps the one who created those exquisite cookies—and, some time later, you might well have called him up and asked him to cater a private party. In which case it is very likely that you were surprised to discover, upon opening your door, that Jason Lepes was fifteen years old.

Flashback to January, 2001. Jason's father, a consultant, has taken Jason to dinner at Aureole as a special treat. Jason is only in ninth grade, but he is already six feet three inches tall and, not yet having suffered his fractured hip, he is active on his high-school basketball team. He has a teen-age boy's sleepy eyes and sleepy drawl. His hair is brown and curly and he has a round nose. He and his father have driven down from Bronxville, where they live. Aureole is not every fifteen-year-old's idea of a special treat, but Jason is not every fifteen-year-old. He is a precocious foodie. He has watched cooking shows since he was twelve. He cooks five-course dinners for twenty friends involving truffles, ostrich, duck, risotto, squab, which he smokes himself at the stove ("Smoked squab is not done often enough," he says), and wild-mushroom ravioli (his signature dish). "Just stuff that most people don't eat every day" is his general principle. Nonetheless, Jason is amazed by the food at Aureole. He says to his father, "I want to learn how to make this."

Soon afterward, he e-mails the restaurant and begs. He will work without pay, he says; he will do anything for them, he just wants to be in the kitchen. Astoundingly, the chef of Aureole says yes. And he is not sorry. Early on, Jason slices onions, hundreds and hundreds of onions. He sniffs the ovens to check whether anything is burning. (He is not himself allowed to take anything out.) It is tense and fast-paced in Aureole's kitchen, and he learns how not to antagonize his superiors. He works for nothing twelve hours a day (from twelve to twelve) every Saturday during the semester, and ten hours a day, six days a week, during vacation. Soon, he is cooking "family meal"—dinner for the staff, made from the restaurant's leftovers. One terrible day, he drops family meal—chili, alas—all over the kitchen floor, but he never does it again.

Finally, after about six months, Jason is promoted. He is paid. He wises up and stops sneaking his card into the cookie bags. He flips steaks at the grill station. He is thrilled; but then, in the back of his mind, he hears the siren call of high-school weekends. "Missing out on Saturday nights is a drag," he says. "Though when you're fifteen it's not so bad." But soon Jason is sixteen. A year and a half after he started at Aureole, having learned what he wanted to learn, he quits.

These days, Jason still cooks, but it's not the same. It's hard for him to say why. Partly, it was his father, who, dismayed by Jason's bad grades, would say to him, "You want to make patty-cakes for the rest of your life?" Partly, it was that he started reading a lot of books—he discovered existentialism, became a libertarian anarchist, and resolved to learn Mongolian in a year. Partly, it was that he wasn't as shy as he used to be. He started going to more parties. He handed out libertarian leaflets outside Columbia University. The fact was, though Aureole's kitchen was crowded, it was lonely there. Everybody else was much older, of course, and when they all went out for a beer after work he could never go with them.

But in the end, Jason thinks, he stopped cooking mostly because of a girl. "Maybe trite, but true," he says. "Teen-age love messes with your head. I couldn't really think about anything else."

—*Larissa MacFarquhar*

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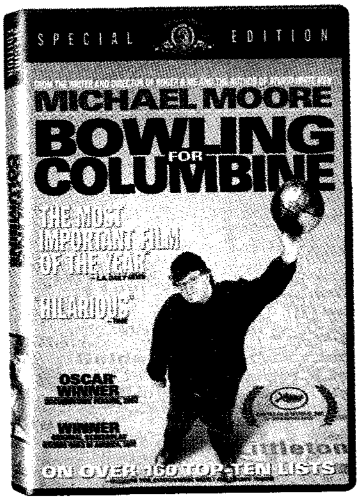

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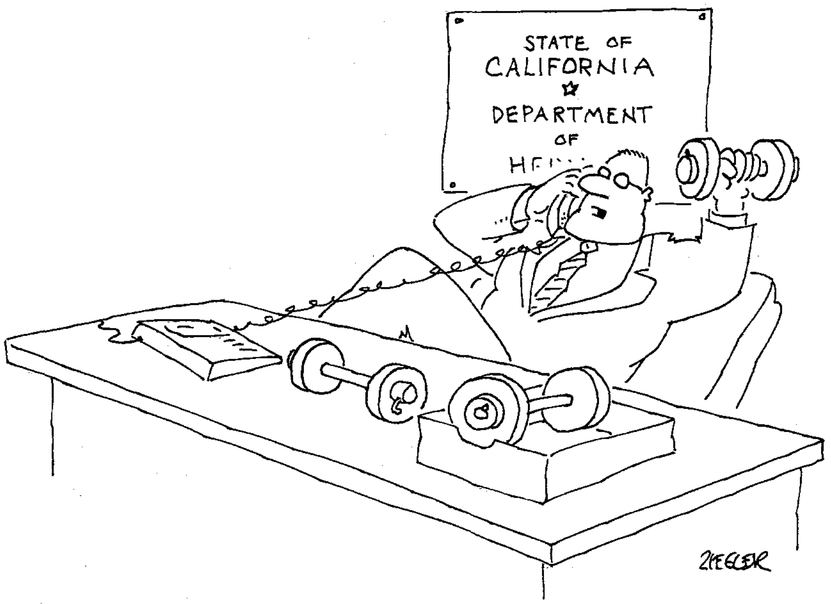
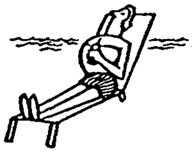


"I'm sorry, you want Glutes—this is Pecs."

* * *

INK
MAKING WAVES



In line for the ferry from Manhattan to Rockaway was a blond woman wearing dark glasses, white shorts, a white shirt, white mules, and a white visor. It was an easy guess that she was bound for Breezy Point, or Breezy, as the natives call it—the gated community at the tip of the Rockaway Peninsula. It was only slightly harder to identify her positively as Dorothy Dunne, the Liz Smith of Rockaway. A picture of her—as a glamorous blonde, with lips parted and a smoldering gaze—runs with her column in the *Wave*, Rockaway's weekly newspaper. Dunne had written about the new ferry service in her column, dropping a big hint: "How nice if the Co-op Blue Goose shuttle bus were there to take me into Breezy Point." (There is no public transportation to Breezy Point.)

Dunne had packed a sandwich for the voyage (mayonnaise on light rye), and she bit into it as the boat sped down the East River. It is a fact known to all who read the *Wave* that Dorothy Dunne is a gal who enjoys food. She has no illusions about her newspaper—the *Wave* is the third-oldest newspaper in New York City, behind the *Post* and the *Times*, and the largest weekly in Queens (though that is perhaps not saying very much)—but it does give its society columnist the clout to attend every cocktail party, wine tasting, Liver Foundation dinner, cruise launching, hotel opening, and breakfast with the President of Lithuania that she can fit into her schedule.

Over the years, *Wave* readers have learned a lot about Dorothy Dunne. She gets her nails done by Janet and her hair cut by Gary, at Studio J. She is active in Breezy Point Surf Club bocce ball, or at least reports when someone has a heart attack or a stroke on the court. She is a master of the left-handed compliment (on an amateur-theatre production: "Barbara Page did a remarkable job as Director even though she had good talent to work with"). She keeps her readers apprised of the health and well-being of Rockaway's beautiful people ("Peter Danzilo is doing nicely after a fall in his home that cracked his skull and broke his hip"). Occasionally, she has to squelch a rumor:

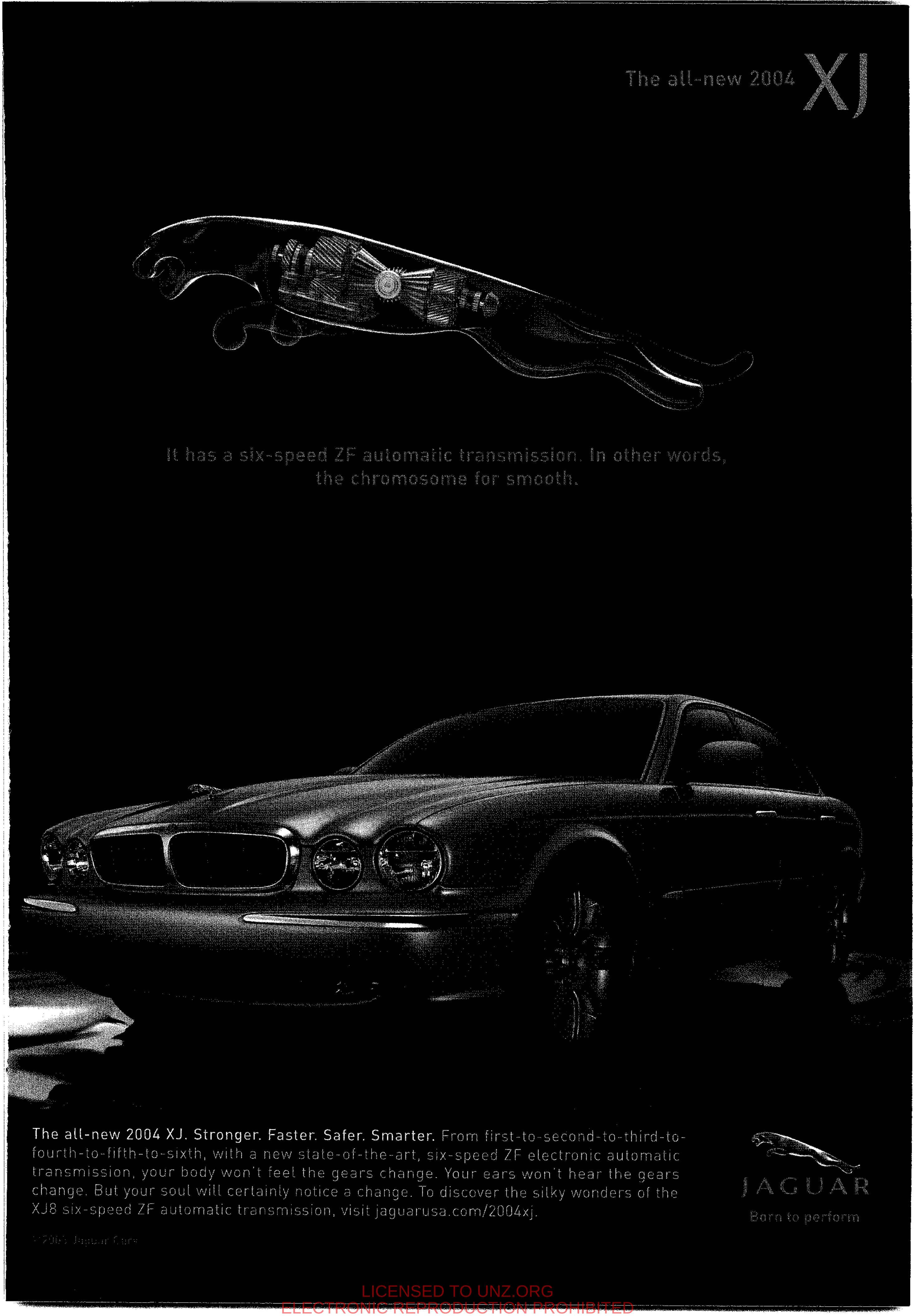
> Ellen and Lenny Wunder were at the bar at Kennedy's and I was startled when they said they heard Claire Ashton had died. I assured them immediately this rumor is not so. Sadly, no one is allowed to see Claire without the consent of her attorney who was handed her guardianship after only knowing her a year. One must first get a court order to visit her. She sleeps most of the day, but, once in a while, I can talk to her around 11AM 7PM or 11PM. She is fine. She is walking now, but has trouble with her one eye.

Dunne's column used to appear on page 6, where she enjoyed an association with the *Post's* gossip page. Then, in March of 2001, during an editorial shakeup, she was banished to the double digits. Lately, too, her own newspaper has been spelling her name wrong in the index (Dorothy Dune). Her signature closing—"Give me a call and away we go!"—is a reference not only to her job as a travel agent (she ends each column with a list of package tours) but to "my Gleason Days": she performed with the June Taylor Dancers on "The Jackie Gleason Show."

As the ferry entered Jamaica Bay, Dunne pointed out some of the sights in Breezy. There was Kennedy's, and the Rockaway Point Yacht Club. The Sugar Bowl, which Dunne mentions from time to time, is on the ocean side, in a row of pastel bungalows. It was at the Sugar Bowl that an unfortunate incident occurred recently and became the talk of the peninsula. Apparently, a twelve-year-old Hispanic girl and a local woman got in an argument while they were in line for the bathroom there. Later, the two met again on the street, and the woman, who was pulling a wagon, pushed it at the girl's legs. The girl went to the hospital, and the next day she was on crutches. The Breezy Point woman was charged with a hate crime. "It is a black eye to the community," Dunne wrote.

The ferry docked behind the old Coast Guard station in Roxbury, an outpost of Breezy Point, whose nonagenarian columnist, Dotty Taphouse, died last year. Her column, "Dot on Roxbury," usually ran on the same page as "Dorothy Dunne," and, in its faithful chronicling of births and deaths, weddings and christenings, it read a lot like Deuteronomy. (Dotty Taphouse was duly eulogized by Dorothy Dunne: "I never knew Dot too well and was ill at the time of her death.") A shuttle bus was available to take passengers to Riis Park Beach. No sign of the Blue Goose. Dorothy Dunne planted herself on Rockaway Point Boulevard and stuck out her thumb to catch a ride.

—*Mary Norris*



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JAGUAR

Born to perform

LEAVE NO PARENT BEHIND

To hear American politicians tell it, nothing matters more to good public policy than the family. Bill Clinton campaigned under the slogan "Putting Families First." George W. Bush promised to "Leave No Child Behind." John Kerry, Joe Lieberman, and Howard Dean are squabbling over what they will do for "working families." And in the past two weeks Washington has shown its high regard for parenting by sending out twenty-five million tax-credit checks to people with kids. Roughly speaking, this means that eighty per cent of taxpayers are subsidizing the twenty per cent who are eligible for the checks.

You might, then, expect American families to be luxuriating in good fortune. But, compared with people who don't have children, people who do are in worse economic shape than they've ever been in. The Harvard law professor Elizabeth Warren and her daughter Amelia Warren Tyagi demonstrate, in their forthcoming book "The Two-Income Trap," that having a child is now the best indicator of whether someone will end up in "financial collapse." Married couples with children are twice as likely as childless couples to file for bankruptcy. They're seventy-five per cent more likely to be late paying their bills. And they're also far more likely to face foreclosure on their homes. Most of these people are not, by the usual standards, poor. They're middle-class couples who are in deep financial trouble in large part because they have kids.

In the past two decades or so, the cost of having children has risen much faster than the cost of being childless. Conventional wisdom aside, this has little to do with spoiled kids, acquisitive parents, or PlayStation 2. Instead, it's the result of two things: housing and education. According to the Federal Reserve Board, between 1983 and 1998 the price of housing for married couples with children rose seventy-nine per cent in real terms, roughly three times as much as it did for childless people. One reason is that houses are bigger now. But, according to Warren and Tyagi, the real reason is that parents get into bidding wars for homes in safe neighborhoods with good public schools.

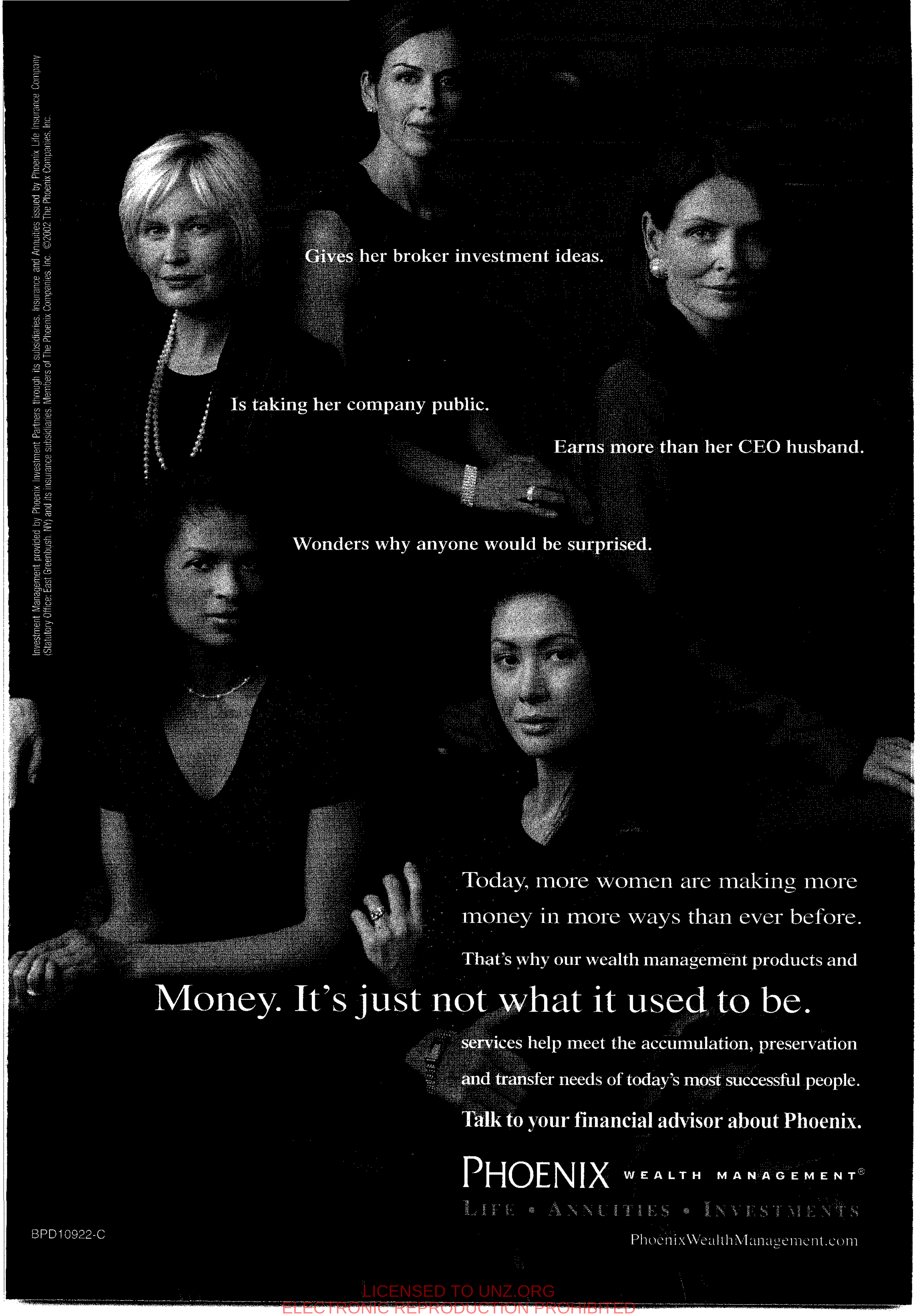
Then, there's college. Thirty years ago, middle-class parents could feel they'd done a good job of raising a child if he or she made it through high school—decent jobs for unskilled and semi-skilled labor were readily available. Today, such jobs are much harder to find, and college is considered a necessity. Needless to say, it is also extremely expensive.

The solution seems simple enough: have fewer kids or none at all. This may seem coldhearted, but it's a choice that many Americans, particularly in the middle class, already find themselves making. Between 1980 and 2000, the percentage of women between forty and forty-four who had no children doubled; the percentage of women who had only one child nearly did, too. Economists have long argued that a child is analogous to a "consumer durable," like a refrigerator. Parents invest time, energy, and money in the child, and in exchange, as the child grows up, they get what the economist Gary Becker has called "psychic income"—as opposed to the real income that children in, say, an agrarian economy could bring in when they grew strong enough to help with the harvest. Becker observed a correlation in the United States between birth rates and the business cycle. When the economy is bad, people tend to have fewer kids. When it picks up, they have more. Although there are obvious limits to this point of view (we're evolutionarily programmed to want children but not refrigerators), it does suggest that, as with most goods, if kids are more expensive, people will accumulate fewer of them.

The problem is that while it may be economically rational for a middle-class professional to forgo having kids, the effect of a baby embargo would be economically disastrous, and not just for the producers of SpongeBob SquarePants. Parents may have to bear the costs of rearing children, but it's society as a whole that reaps the benefits. We all gain from having more people going to college and becoming productive workers. And all of us—even those who have no children—expect that we will be taken care of by others in our old age. The United States has $6.7 trillion in debt and forty trillion in potential obligations to the elderly or soon-to-be-elderly, and we're sticking future workers with the bill. Even if the American birth rate stays where it is, we're headed for serious trouble. If it drops, look out.

In a sense, children are what economists like to call a "public good," like national defense or scientific research. The essential characteristic of a public good is that everyone benefits from it even if not everyone pays for it. Government usually plays a valuable role in making sure that a public good is paid for. This doesn't mean that the state has to take over driving the kids to soccer practice—or, God forbid, require each couple to have 3.2 "Heroes for the Homeland"—but it should certainly help spread the financial burden of raising a family. There may be some sense after all in having those taxpayers who don't have children subsidize those who do, and there's little sense in cutting back on programs like Head Start. All of us, it turns out, have an interest in improving public schools. It may not take a village to raise a child, but these days it seems to take a village to pay for one.

—*James Surowiecki*



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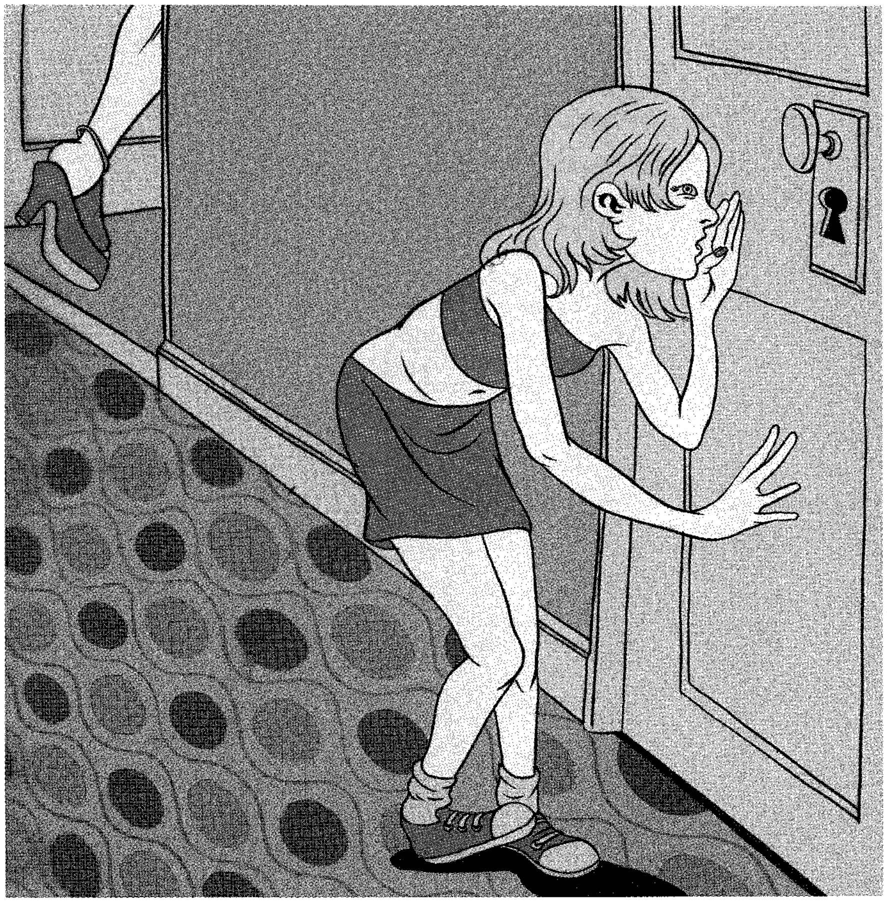
RECOLLECTIONS

THE GIRL NEXT DOOR

How much trouble could a nine-year-old be?

BY DAVID SEDARIS

"Well that little experiment is over," my mother said. "You tried it, it didn't work out, so what do you say we just move on." She was dressed in her roll-up-the-shirtsleeves outfit: the faded turquoise skirt, a cotton head scarf, and one of the sporty blouses my father had bought in the hope she might take up golf. "We'll start with the kitchen," she said. "That's always the best way, isn't it?"



Given her home life, it wasn't surprising that Brandi latched onto me.

ZOHAR LAZAR

I was moving again. This time because of the neighbors.

"Oh, no," my mother said. "They're not to blame. Let's be honest now." She liked to take my problems back to the source, which was usually me. Like, for instance, when I got food poisoning it wasn't the chef's fault. "*You're* the one who wanted to go Oriental. *You're* the one who ordered the lomain."

"Lo mein. It's two words."

"Oh, he speaks Chinese now! Tell me, Charlie Chan, what's the word for six straight hours of vomiting and diarrhea?"

What she meant was that I'd tried to save money. The cheap Chinese restaurant, the seventy-five-dollar-a-month apartment: "Cut corners and it'll always come back to bite you in the ass." That was one of her sayings. But if you didn't *have* money how could you *not* cut corners?

"And whose fault is it that you don't have any money? I'm not the one who turned up his nose at a full-time job. I'm not the one who spends his entire paycheck down at the hobby shop."

"I understand that."

"Well good," she said, and then we began to wrap the breakables.

In my version of the story, the problem began with the child next door, a third grader who, according to my mother, was bad news right from the start. "Put it together," she'd said when I first called to tell her about it. "Take a step back. Think."

But what was there to think about? She was a nine-year-old girl.

"Oh, they're the worst," my mother said. "What's her name?" I made something up. "Brandi? Well that's cheap, isn't it."

"I'm sorry," I said. "But aren't I talking to someone who named her daughter *Tiffany*?"

"My hands were tied!" she shouted. "The damned Greeks had me against the wall and you know it."

"Whatever you say."

"So this girl," my mother continued—and I knew what she would ask before she even said it. "What does her father do?"

I told her there wasn't a father, at least not one that I knew about, and then I waited as she lit a fresh cigarette. "Let's see," she said. "Nine-year-old girl named after an alcoholic beverage. Single mother in a neighborhood the police won't even go to. What else have you got for me?" She spoke as if I'd formed these people out of clay, as if it were my fault that the girl was nine years old and her mother couldn't keep a husband. "I don't suppose this woman has a job, does she?"

"She's a bartender."

"Oh, that's splendid," my mother said. "Go on."

The woman worked nights and left her daughter alone from four in the afternoon until two or three in the morning. Both were blond, their hair almost white, with invisible eyebrows and lashes. The mother darkened hers with pencil, but the girl appeared to have none at all. Her face was like the weather in one of those places with no discernible seasons. Every now and then, the circles under her eyes would shade to purple. She might show up with a fat lip or a scratch on her neck but her features betrayed nothing.

You had to feel sorry for a girl like that. No father, no eyebrows, and that mother. Our apartments shared a common wall, and every night I'd hear the woman stomping home from work. Most often she was with someone, but whether alone or with company she'd find some excuse to bully her daughter out of bed. Brandi had left a doughnut on the TV or Brandi had forgotten to drain her bathwater. Those are important lessons to learn, but there's something to be said for leading by example. I never went into their apartment, but what I saw from the door was pretty rough, not simply messy or chaotic but hopeless, the lair of a depressed person.

Given her home life, it wasn't surprising that Brandi latched onto me. A normal mother might have wondered what was up—her nine-year-old daughter spending time with a twenty-six-year-old man—but this one didn't seem to care. I was just free stuff to her: a free babysitter, a free cigarette machine, the whole store. I'd hear her through the wall sometimes. "Hey, go ask your friend for a roll of toilet paper." "Go ask your friend to make you a sandwich." If company was coming and she wanted to be alone, she'd kick the girl out. "Why don't you go next door and see what your little playmate is up to?"

Before I moved in, Brandi's mother had used the couple downstairs, but you could tell that the relationship had soured. Next to the grocery carts chained to their porch was a store-bought sign, the "No Trespassing" followed by a handwritten "This meens you, Brandi!!!!"

There was a porch on the second floor as well, with one door leading to Brandi's bedroom and another door leading to mine. Technically, the two apartments were supposed to share it, but the entire thing was taken up with their junk and so I rarely used it.

"I can't wait until you get out of your little slumming phase," my mother had said on first seeing the building. She spoke as if she'd been raised in splendor, but in fact her childhood home had been much worse. The suits she wore, the delicate bridges holding her teeth in place—it was all an invention. "You live in bad neighborhoods so you can feel superior," she'd say, the introduction, always, to a fight. "The point is to move up in the world. Even sideways will do in a pinch, but what's the point in moving down?"

As a relative newcomer to the middle class, she worried that her children might slip back into the world of public assistance and bad teeth. The finer things were not yet in our blood, or at least that was the way she saw it. My thrift-shop clothing drove her wild, as did the secondhand mattress lying without benefit of box springs upon my hardwood floor. "It's not *ironic*," she'd say. "It's not *ethnic*. It's filthy."

Bedroom suites were fine for people like my parents, but as an artist I preferred to rough it. Poverty lent my little dabblings a much needed veneer of authenticity, and I imagined myself repaying the debt by gently lifting the lives of those around me, not en masse but one by one, the old-fashioned way. It was, I thought, the least I could do.

I told my mother that I had allowed Brandi into my apartment, and she sighed deeply into the telephone. "And I bet you gave her the grand tour, didn't you? Mr. Showoff. Mr. Big Shot." We had a huge fight over that one. I didn't call her for two days. Then the phone rang. "Brother," she said, "you have no idea what you're getting yourself into."

A neglected girl comes to your door and what are you supposed to do, turn her away?

"Exactly," my mother said. "Throw her the hell out."

But I couldn't. What my mother defined as boasting I considered a standard show-and-tell. "This is my stereo system," I'd said to Brandi. "This is the electric skillet I received last Christmas, and here's a little something I picked up in Greece last summer." I thought I was exposing her to the things a regular person might own and appreciate, but all she heard was the possessive. "This is my honorable-mention ribbon" meant "It belongs to *me*. It's not yours." Every now and then, I'd give her a little something, convinced that she'd treasure it forever. A postcard of the Acropolis, prestamped envelopes, packaged towelettes bearing the insignia of Olympic Airways. "Really?" she'd say. "For me?"

The only thing she owned, the only

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thing special, was a foot-tall doll in a clear-plastic carrying case. It was a dime-store version of one of those Dolls from Many Countries, this one Spanish with a beet-red dress and a droopy mantilla on her head. Behind her, printed on cardboard, was the place where she lived: a piñata-lined street snaking up a hill to a dusty bullring. The doll had been given to Brandi by her grandmother, who was forty years old and lived in a trailer beside an Army base.

“What is this?” my mother asked. “A skit from ‘Hee Haw’? Who the hell *are* these people?”

“These people,” I said, “are my neighbors, and I’d appreciate it if you wouldn’t make fun of them. The grandmother doesn’t need it, I don’t need it, and I’m pretty sure a nine-year-old-girl doesn’t need it either.” I didn’t tell her that the grandmother was nicknamed Rascal or that, in the photograph Brandi showed me, the woman was wearing cutoff shorts and an ankle bracelet.

“We don’t talk to her anymore,” Brandi had said when I handed back the picture. “She’s out of our life, and we’re glad of it.” Her voice was dull and robotic, and I got the impression that the line had been fed to her by her mother. She used a similar tone when introducing her doll: “She’s not for playing with. She’s for display.”

Whoever imposed this rule had obviously backed it up with a threat. Brandi would trace her finger along the outside of the box, tempting herself, but never once did I see her lift the lid. It was as if the doll would explode if removed from her natural environment. Her world was the box, and a strange world it was.

“See,” Brandi said one day. “She’s on her way home to cook up those clams.”

She was talking about the castanets dangling from the doll’s wrist. It was a funny thought, childish, and I probably should have let it go rather than playing the know-it-all. “If she were an American doll those might be clams,” I said. “But instead she’s from Spain, and those are called castanets.” I wrote the word on a piece of paper. “ ‘Castanets,’ look it up.”

“She’s not from Spain, she’s from Fort Bragg.”

“Well, maybe she was *bought* there,” I said. “But she’s supposed to be Spanish.”

“And what’s *that* supposed to mean?” It was hard to tell without the eyebrows, but I think she was mad at me.

“It’s not *supposed* to mean anything,” I said. “It’s just true.”

“You’re full of it. There’s no such place.”

“Sure there is,” I said. “It’s right next to France.”

“Yeah, right. What’s that, a store?”

I couldn’t believe I was having this conversation. How could you not know that Spain was a country? Even if you were nine years old, it seems you would have picked it up on TV or something. “Oh, Brandi,” I said. “We’ve got to find you a map.”

Because I couldn’t do it any other way, we fell into a tight routine. I had a part-time construction job and would return home at exactly five-thirty. Five minutes later, Brandi would knock on my door, and stand there blinking until I let her in. I was going through a little wood-carving phase at the time, whittling figures whose heads resembled the various tools I worked with during the day: a hammer, a hatchet, a wire brush. Before beginning, I’d arrange some paper and colored pencils on my desk. “Draw your doll,” I’d say. “Copy the bullring in her private environment. Express yourself!” I encouraged her to broaden her horizons, but she usually quit after the first few minutes, claiming it was too much work.

Mainly she observed, her eyes shifting between my knife and the Spanish doll parked before her on the desktop. She’d talk about how stupid her teachers were, and then she’d ask what I would do if I had a million dollars. If I’d had a million dollars at that time in my life I probably would have spent every last penny of it on drugs, but I didn’t admit it, because I wanted to set a good example. “Let’s see,” I’d say. “If I had that kind of money, I’d probably give it away.”

“Yeah, right. You’d what, just hand it out to people on the street?”

“No, I’d set up a foundation and try to make a difference in people’s lives.” At this one even the doll was gagging.

When asked what she’d do with a million dollars Brandi described cars and gowns and heavy bracelets encrusted with gems.

“But what about others? Don’t you want to make them happy?”

“No. I want to make them jealous.”

“You don’t mean that,” I’d say.

“Try me.”

“Oh, Brandi.” I’d make her a glass

THE HOUSE LEFT IN ENGLISH

The house has stopped its desperate travelling.
It won’t fly to New Orleans, or to Hungary again,
though it counts, and swears, in Magyar.

It is left in English with its life suspended,
meals in the freezer, clothes on airy shelves,
ski badges prickling a wall chart of the Alps.

The house plays radio, its lights clock on and off,
but it won’t answer the phone, even in Swiss German.
Since the second recession of helped steps

the house quotes from its life and can’t explain:
dress-cutter’s chalk. Melbourne Cup Day 1950.
Alphorn skullcaps. Wartime soy flour, with an onion!

All earlier houses and times, in black and white,
are boxed by aged children visiting to dust this one
on its leafy corner and still, for a while, in color.

—*Les Murray*

of chocolate milk and she'd elaborate on her list until six-fifty-five, when friendship period was officially over. If work had gone slowly and there weren't many shavings to sweep up, I might let her stay an extra two minutes, but never longer.

"Why do I have to go right this second?" she asked one evening. "Are you going to work or something?"

"Well no, not exactly."

"Then what's your hurry?"

I never should have told her. The good part about being an obsessive-compulsive is that you're always on time for work. The bad part is that you're on time for everything. Rinsing your coffee cup, taking a bath, walking your clothes to the laundromat: there's no mystery to your comings and goings, no room for spontaneity. During that time of my life, I went to the IHOP every evening, heading over on my bike at exactly seven and returning at exactly nine. I never ate there, just drank coffee, facing the exact same direction in the exact same booth and reading library books for exactly an hour. After this, I would ride to the grocery store. Even if I didn't need anything I'd go, because that's what that time was allotted for. If the lines were short, I'd bike home the long way or circle the block a few times, unable to return early, as those five or ten minutes weren't scheduled for apartment time.

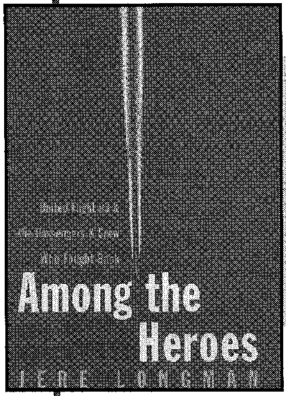
"What would happen if you were ten minutes late?" Brandi asked. My mother often asked the same question—everyone did. "You think the world will fall apart if you walk through that door at nine-o-four?"

They said it jokingly, but the answer was yes, that's exactly what I thought would happen. The world would fall apart. On the nights when another customer occupied my regular IHOP booth, I was shattered. "Is there a problem?" the waitress would ask, and I'd find that I couldn't even speak.

Brandi had been incorporated into my schedule for a little over a month when I started noticing certain things missing—things like pencil erasers and these little receipt books I'd picked up in Greece. In searching through my drawers and cabinets, I discovered that other things were missing as well: a box of tacks, a key ring in the form of a peanut.

When a book is...

gripping



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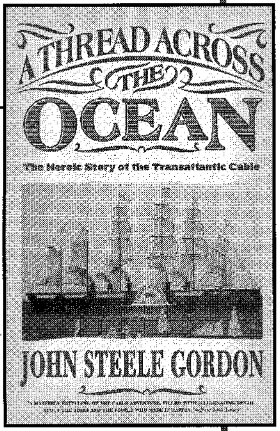
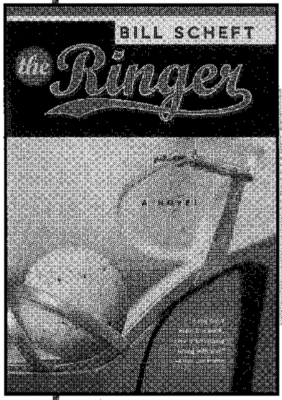

A Thread Across the Ocean
The Heroic Story of the Transatlantic Cable
John Steele Gordon



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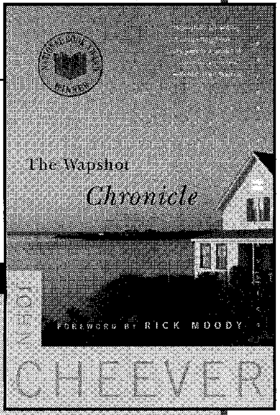

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NOW IN PAPERBACK

"I see where this is going," my mother said. "The little sneak unlatched your porch door and wandered over while you were off at the pancake house. That's what happened, isn't it?"

I hated that she'd figured it out so quickly.

When I confronted Brandi, she broke down immediately. It was as if she'd been dying to confess, had rehearsed it even. The stammered apology, the plea for mercy. She hugged me around the waist, and when she finally pulled away I felt my shirt front, expecting to find it wet with tears. It wasn't. I don't know why I did what I did next, or, rather, I guess I do. It was all part of my ridiculous plan to set a good example. "You know what we have to do now, don't you?" I sounded firm and fair until I considered the consequences, at which point I faltered. "We've got to go . . . and tell your mother what you just *did*."

I half hoped that Brandi might talk me out of it, but instead she just shrugged.

"I bet she did," my mother said. "I mean, come on, you might as well have reported her to the cat. What did you expect that mother to do, needlepoint a sampler with the Ten Commandments? Wake up, Dopey, the woman's a whore."

Of course she was right. Brandi's mother listened with her arms crossed, a good sign until I realized that her anger was directed toward me rather than her daughter. In the far corner of the room a long-haired man cleaned beneath his fingernails with a pair of scissors. He looked my way for a moment, and then turned his attention back to the television.

"So she took a pencil eraser," Brandi's mother said. "What do you want me to do, dial 911?" She made it sound unbelievably petty.

"I just thought you should know what happened," I said.

"Well lucky me. Now I know."

I returned to my apartment and pressed my ear against the bedroom wall. "Who was that?" the guy asked.

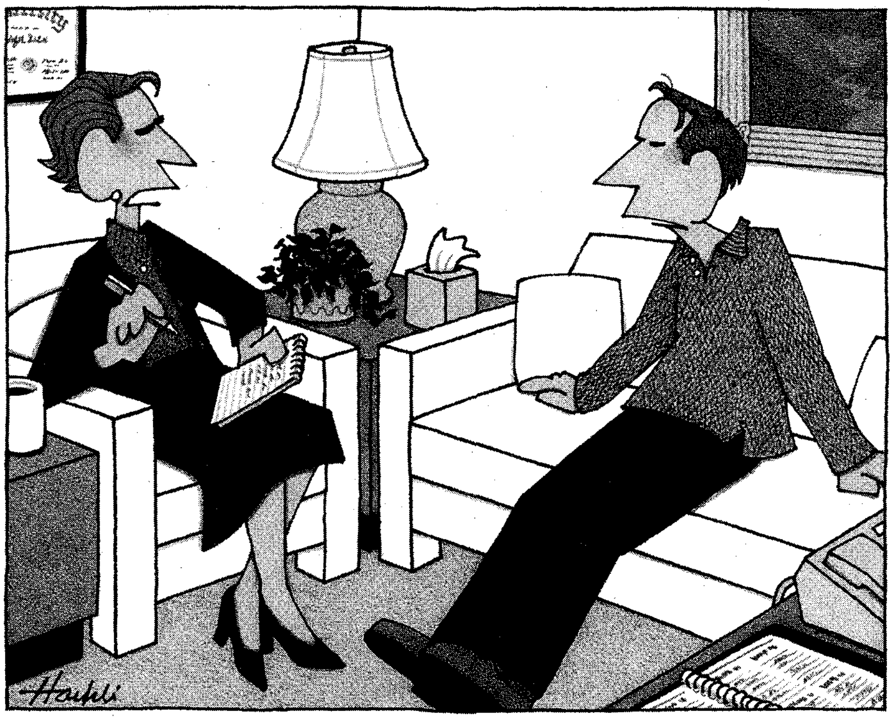
"Oh, just some asshole," Brandi's mother said.

Things cooled down after that. I could forgive Brandi for breaking into my apartment, but I could not forgive her mother. *Just some asshole.* I wanted to go to the place where she worked and burn it down. In relating the story, I found myself employing lines I'd probably heard on public radio. "Children *want* boundaries," I said. "They *need* them." It sounded sketchy to me, but everyone seemed to agree, especially my mother, who suggested that, in this particular case, a five-by-eleven cell might work. She wasn't yet placing the entire blame on me, so it was still enjoyable to tell her things, to warm myself against the comforting glow of her outrage.

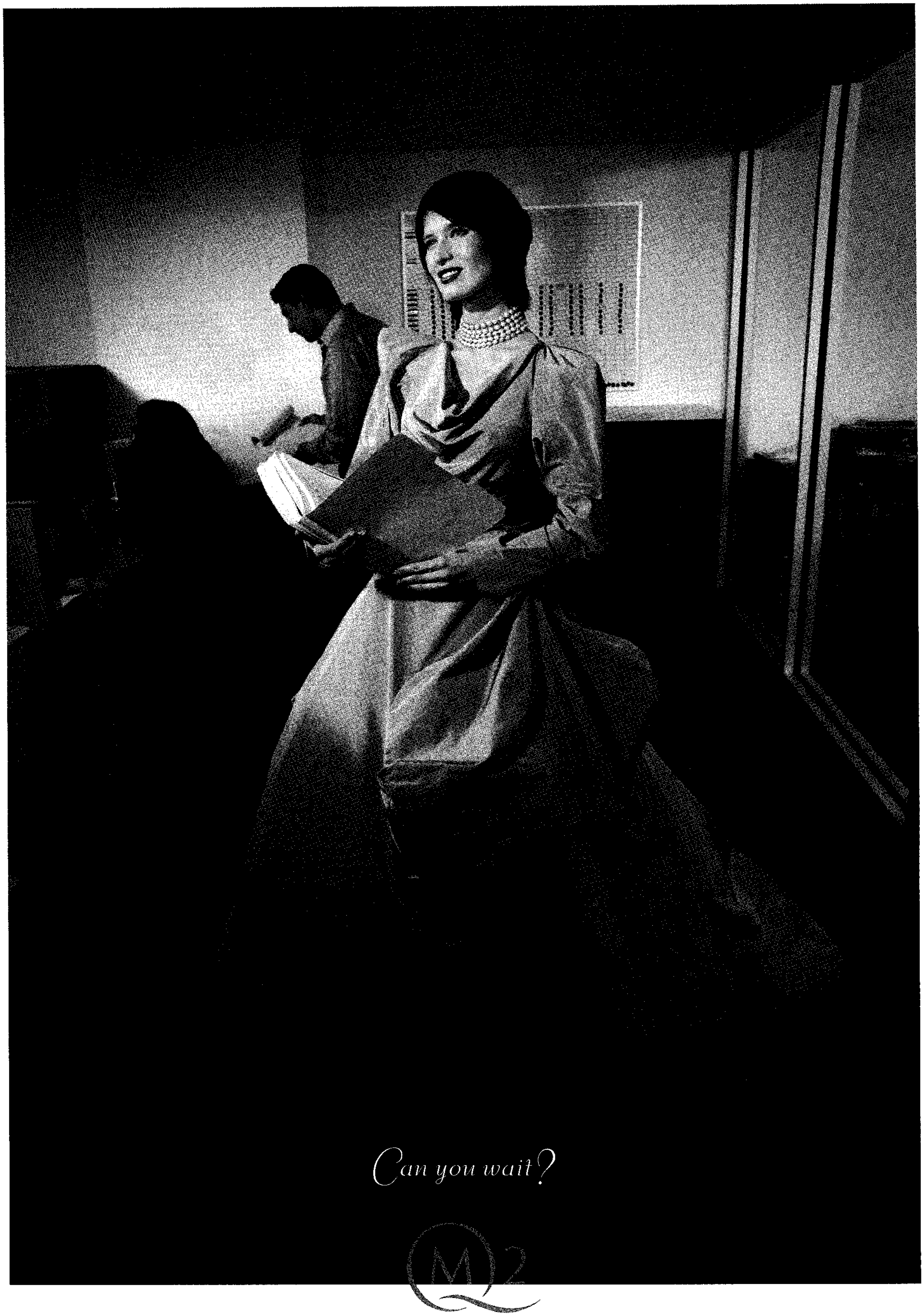
The next time Brandi knocked, I pretended to be out—a ploy that fooled no one. She called my name, figured out where this was headed, and then went home to watch TV. I didn't plan to stay mad forever. A few weeks of the silent treatment and then I figured we'd pick up where we left off. In the meantime, I occasionally passed her in the front yard, just standing there as if she were waiting for someone normal to pick her up. I'd say, "Hello, how's it going?" and she'd give me this tight little smile, the sort you'd offer if someone you hated was walking around with chocolate stains on the back of his pants.

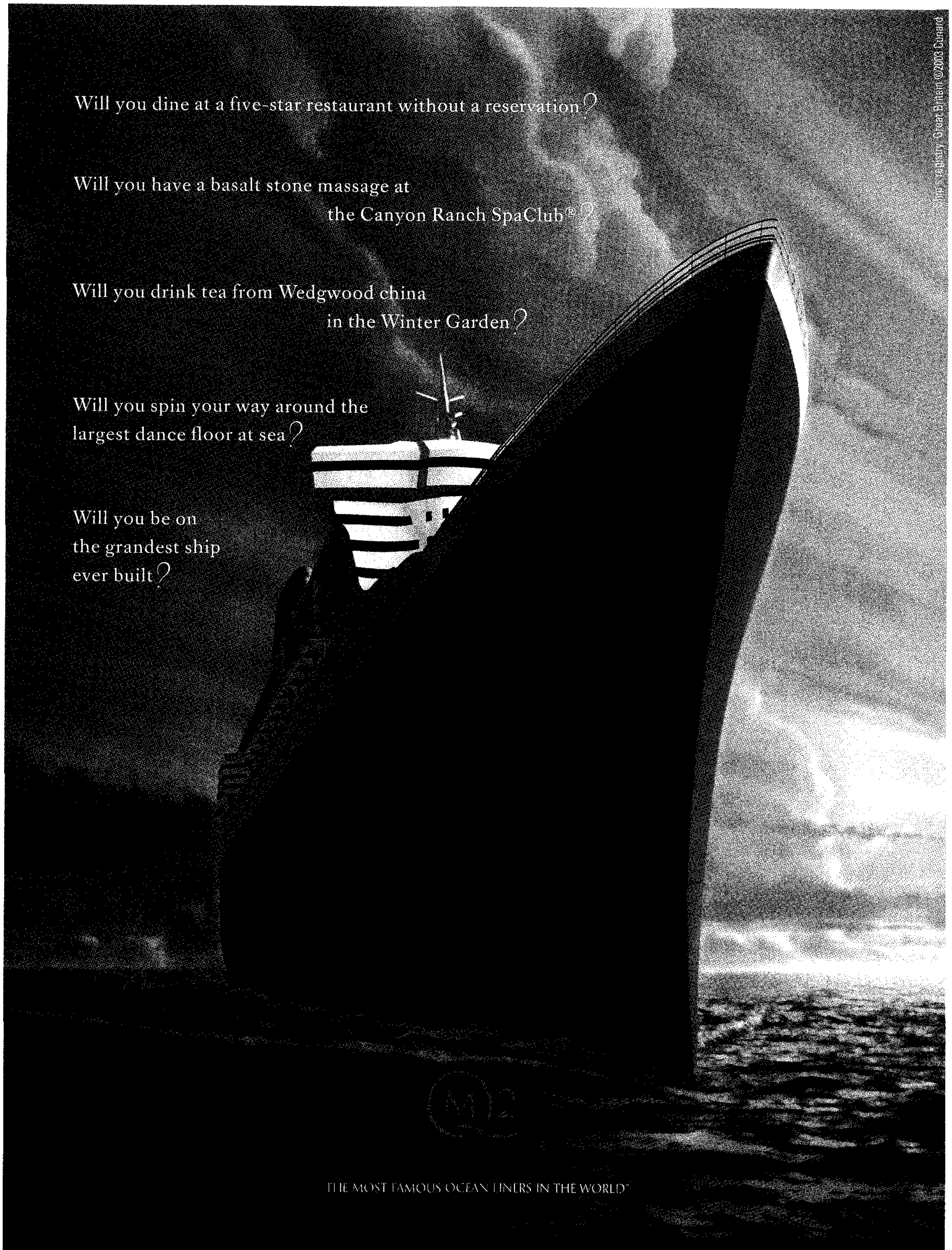
Back when our neighborhood was prosperous, the building we lived in was a single-family home, and sometimes I liked to imagine it as it once was: with proud rooms and chandeliers, a stately working household serviced by maids and coachmen. I was carrying out the trash one afternoon and came upon what used to be the coal cellar, a grim crawl space now littered with shingles and mildewed cardboard boxes. There were worn-out fuses and balls of electrical wire, and there, in the back, a pile of objects I recognized as my own, things I hadn't noticed missing—photographs, for instance, and slides of my bad art work. Moisture had fouled the casings, and when I backed out of the cellar and held them to the sun I saw that the film had been scratched, not by accident but intentionally, with a pin or a razor. "Yur a ashole," one of them read. "Suk my dick why dont you." The spelling was all over the place, the writing tiny and furious, bleeding into the mind-bending designs spewed by mental patients who don't know when to stop. It was the exact effect I'd been striving for in my bland, imitation folk art, so not only did I feel violated, I felt jealous. I mean, this girl was the real thing.

There were pages of slides, all of them etched with ugly messages. Photographs, too, were ruined. Here was me as



"When you lie about yourself, is it to appear closer to or farther away from the middle of the bell curve?"


Can you wait?
M2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a toddler with the word "Shity" scratched into my forehead. Here was my newlywed mother netting crabs with her eyes clawed out. Included in the pile were all of the little presents accepted with such false gratitude, the envelopes and postcards, even the towelettes, everything systematically destroyed.

I gathered it all up and went straight to Brandi's mother. It was two o'clock in the afternoon and she was dressed in one of those thigh-length robes people wear when practicing karate. This was morning for her, and she stood drinking cola from a tall glass mug. "Fuck," she said. "Haven't we been through this?"

"Well, actually, no." My voice was higher than normal, and unstable. "Actually, we *haven't* been through this."

I'd considered myself an outsider in this neighborhood, something like a missionary among the savages, but standing there panting, my hair netted with cobwebs, I got the horrible feeling that I fit right in.

Brandi's mother glanced down at the filthy stack in my hand, frowning, as if these were things I was trying to sell door to door. "You know what?" she said. "I don't need this right now. No, you know what? I don't need it, period. Do you think having a baby was easy for me? I don't have nobody helping me out, a husband or day care or whatever, I'm all alone here, understand?"

I tried putting the conversation back on track, but as far as Brandi's mother was concerned there was no other track. It was all about her. "I work my own hours *and* cover shifts for Kathy fucking Cornelius and on my one day off I've got some faggot hassling me about some shit I don't even *know* about? I don't think so. Not today I don't, so why don't you go find somebody else to dump on."

She slammed the door in my face and I stood in the hallway wondering, *Who is Kathy Cornelius*? *What just happened*?

In the coming days, I ran the conversation over and over in my mind, thinking of all the fierce and sensible things I should have said, things like "Hey, *I'm* not the one who decided to have children," and "It's not *my* problem that you have to cover shifts for Kathy fucking Cornelius."

"It wouldn't have made any difference," my mother said. "A woman like that, the way she sees it she's a victim. Everyone's against her, no matter what."

I was so angry and shaken that I left the apartment and went to stay with my parents, on the other side of town. My mom drove me to the IHOP and back, right on schedule, but it wasn't the same. On my bike I was left to my own thoughts, but now I had her lecturing me, both coming and going. "What did you hope to gain by letting that girl into your apartment? And don't tell me you wanted to make a difference in her life, please, I just ate." I got it that night and then again the following morning. "Do you want me to give you a ride back to your little shantytown?" she asked, but I was mad at her, and so I took the bus.

I thought things couldn't get much worse and then, that evening, they did. I was just returning from the IHOP and was on the landing outside Brandi's door when I heard her whisper, "Faggot." She had her mouth to the keyhole and her voice was puny and melodic. It was the way I'd always imagined a moth might sound. "Faggot. What's the matter, faggot? What's wrong, huh?"

She laughed as I scrambled into my apartment, and then she ran to the porch and began to broadcast through my bedroom door. "Little faggot, little tattletale. You think you're so smart but you don't know shit."

"That's it," my mother said. "We've got to get you out of there." There was no talk of going to the police or social services, just "Pack up your things. She won."

"But can't I . . . "

"Ho ho no," my mother said. "You've got her mad now and there's no turning back. All she has to do is go to the authorities, saying you molested her. Is that what you want? One little phone call and your life is ruined."

"But I didn't do *anything*. I'm gay, remember?"

"That's not going to save you," she said. "Push comes to shove and who do you think they're going to believe, a nine-year-old girl or a full-grown man who gets his jollies carving little creatures out of balsa wood?"

"They're *not* little creatures!" I yelled. "They're tool people!"

"What the hell difference does it make? In the eyes of the law you're just some nut with a knife who sits in the pancake house staring at a goddam stopwatch. You dress that girl in something other than a tube top and prop her up on the witness stand—crying her eyes out—and what do you think is going to happen? Get that mother in on the act and you've got both a criminal trial *and* a civil suit on your hands."

"You watch too much TV."

"Not as much as they do," she said. "I can guaran-goddam-tee you that. You think these people can't smell money?"

"But I haven't got any."

"It's not your money they'll be after," she said. "It's mine."

"You mean Dad's." I was smarting over the "little creatures" comment and wanted to hurt her, but it didn't work.

"I mean *our* money," she said. "You think I don't know how these things work? I wasn't just born some middle-aged woman with a nice purse and a decent pair of shoes. My God, the things you don't know. My *God*."

My new apartment was eight blocks away, facing our city's first Episcopal church. My mother paid the deposit and the first month's rent and came with her station wagon to help me pack and move my things. Carrying a box of my featherweight balsa-wood sculptures out onto the landing, her hair gathered beneath a gingham scarf, how, I wondered, did she appear to Brandi, who was certainly watching through the keyhole. What did she represent to her? The word "mother" wouldn't do, as I don't really think she understood what it meant. A person who shepherds you along the way and helps you out when you're in trouble—what would she call that thing? A queen? A crutch? A teacher?

I heard a noise from behind the door, and then the little moth voice. "Bitch," Brandi whispered.

I fled back into the apartment, but my mother didn't even pause. "Sister," she said, "you don't know the half of it." ◆

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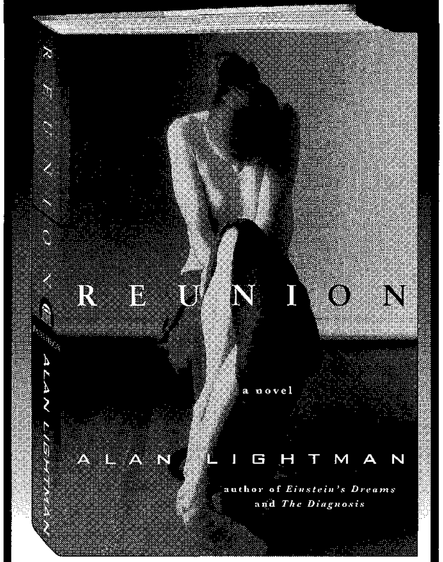

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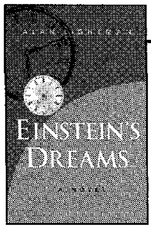

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THE SPORTING SCENE

NASCAR'S NEW TRACK

A stock-car-racing dynasty looks to the future.

BY KEVIN CONLEY

William Clifton France, the seventy-year-old patriarch of the family that owns NASCAR, the National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing, is not the richest man in sports: Paul Allen, Mark Cuban, and Wayne Huizenga, all of whom bought athletic teams after becoming wealthy, have more money. France, however, is the richest man *from* sports. His personal fortune, estimated by *Forbes* to be a billion dollars, comes entirely from auto racing. Bill, Jr., as he is known, would rather not say that he owns NASCAR—he prefers to say that he is the "steward" of the sport—but the distinction is lost on most people. The sport could go on without France and his family, but only if they sold it.

And why would they? NASCAR, second only to football in television ratings, has a $2.4-billion broadcast contract through 2006. Thirty-six weekends a year, its premier racing series, the Winston Cup, brings an average of a hundred thousand people to the track. In 2002, seventeen of the country's twenty most highly attended sporting events were Winston Cup races. Big cities, including New York, are clamoring to be chosen for Winston Cup weekends, which bring in anywhere from twenty-five million dollars for races in the rural Carolinas to more than two hundred million for events in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles.

Despite its size, NASCAR remains unquestionably a family business. In January, Bill, Jr., and his two children, Brian France and Lesa France Kennedy, showed up in Concord, North Carolina, to promote NASCAR's latest project: a ten-million-dollar, sixty-one-thousand-square-foot research center that will help devise new safety measures for stock cars (and police the tendency among racing teams to cheat a little bit under the hood). At the press event, which was held on a platform stage inside one of the center's enormous garages, Bill, Jr., sat quietly in the front row of the audience, next to Lesa, who is forty-two. She is the president of International Speedway Corporation, which owns nearly half the tracks on the Winston Cup circuit; she reports to Jim France, the C.E.O. of I.S.C., who is Bill, Jr.,'s brother and a fellow-billionaire. Several feet away was forty-year-old Brian, NASCAR's executive vice-president and vice-chairman. He sat on the stage, watching the video presentation and waiting for his turn to speak. On paper, Lesa's employer and Brian's are separate entities—the former is publicly traded and the latter privately held. But I.S.C. and NASCAR share headquarters in Daytona Beach, Florida. Both companies have named Lesa, Brian, and Jim to their boards of directors. And Bill, Jr., holds the same position in each: chairman of the board.

Bill, Jr., was making his first appearance in public since undergoing open-heart surgery last fall. At the racetrack, he favors colorful Versace silk shirts; at the gathering in Concord, he looked muted, wearing a blue blazer, a black turtleneck, and sensible shoes. His skin was sallow, his hair had thinned, and his breathing was labored; blinking behind his bifocals, he watched the video presentation.

Brian then took the podium, and a slide projection of two maps of the United States appeared. One highlighted states with NASCAR races in 1985—a cluster down in Dixie—and the other showed last year's tally: big gains in the Midwest, the Northeast, and the West. Brian said, with careful vagueness, that this progress would continue, thanks to an initiative called "Realignment 2004 and Beyond." Brian is generally credited with the tremendous growth of NASCAR's merchandising arm, which now brings in two billion dollars a year from sales of seat cushions, walking canes, mud flaps, and similar items. He's not much of an orator, however. Brian tends to rely on buzzwords like "retail activation" and "diversity component," and his speech had the audience in a torpor.

Suddenly, Bill, Jr., stood up. "Let me help Brian out a little bit," he said. Somebody scurried over to hand him a microphone. Bill, Jr., explained the realignment in much blunter terms, singling out four hallowed tracks in Georgia and the Carolinas that weren't selling enough tickets. He threatened to move these race dates to larger markets next year. "This is a good opportunity to take an asset that is underperforming and take it somewhere else," he said. His voice was stern and commanding. "The one advantage I've had laying there in a hospital bed is I'm watching a lot of television," he said. "And I don't like to see a whole lot of empty seats!" Brian listened awkwardly to his father for a few moments; looking chastened, he returned to his seat.

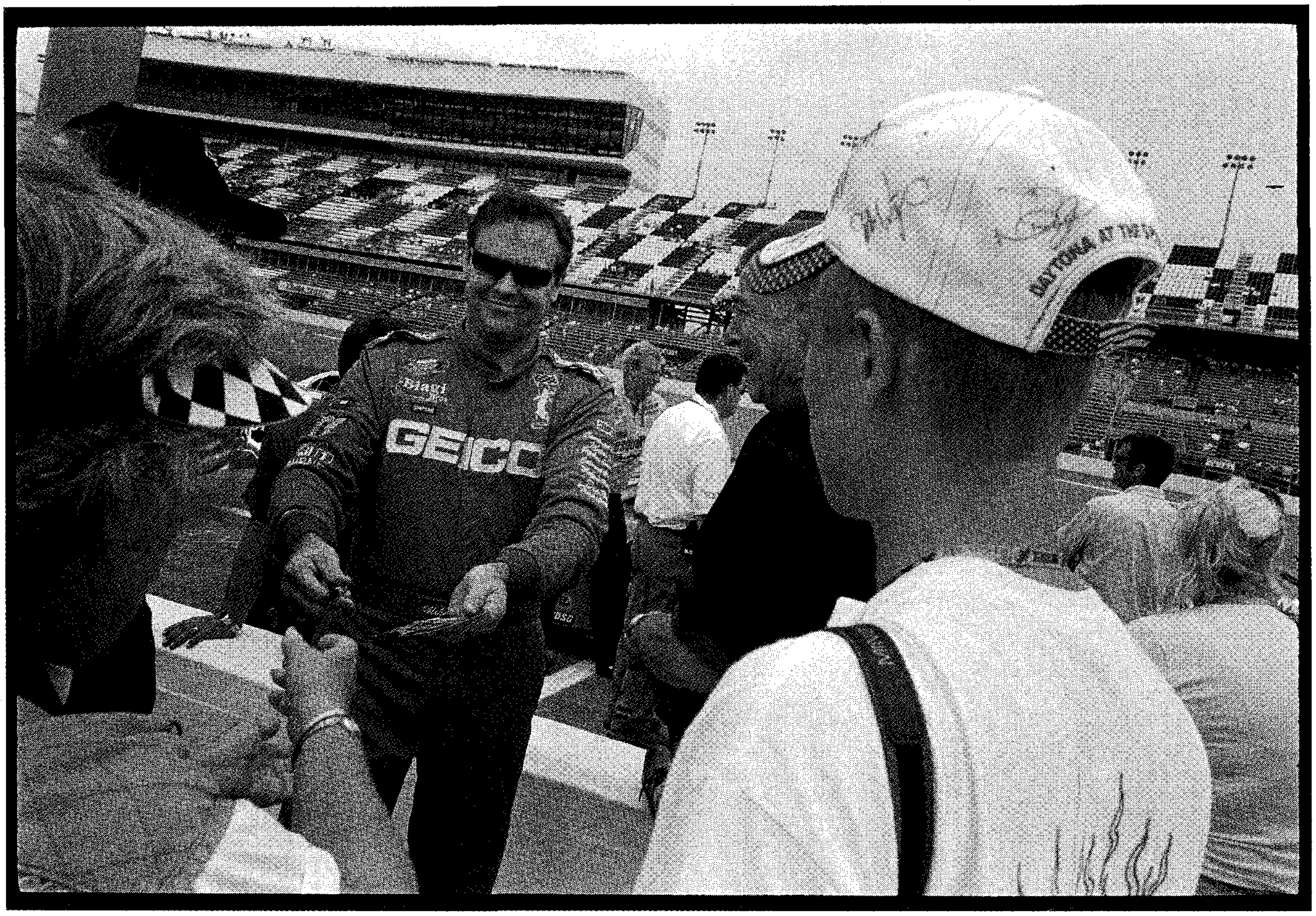
Bill, Jr.,'s aggressive remarks in Concord set the tone for a year in which NASCAR has eagerly abandoned the symbols of its Southern past. The Frances dumped the sport's primary sponsor for thirty-one years, the R. J. Reynolds tobacco company; in 2004, the Winston Cup becomes the NASCAR Nextel Cup Series. In addition, NASCAR booted the Southern 500 out of its traditional slot, on Labor Day weekend, and replaced it with a race at a new track in California.

Bill, Jr., is an American hybrid: the second-generation self-made man. In 1972, at the age of thirty-eight, he inherited a nearly broke tobacco-belt sport from his dad, Big Bill France, and turned that modest claim into an empire. Although he knows kings, presidents, C.E.O.s, and movie stars, he is not impressed by glamour. Left to himself, he's a profane and down-to-earth old salt who likes to ride on his powerboat, fish, and eat hot dogs.

A few weeks after the event in Concord, Bill, Jr., agreed to meet with me in Daytona Beach, where he lives with his wife, Betty Jane. Soon after arriving in town, I learned that Bill, Jr., was in the hospital again, suffering from bronchitis. He has been there a lot in recent years—his heart problems were preceded by a hip fracture, broken ankles, and cancer. Even though he was laid up, he agreed to see me.

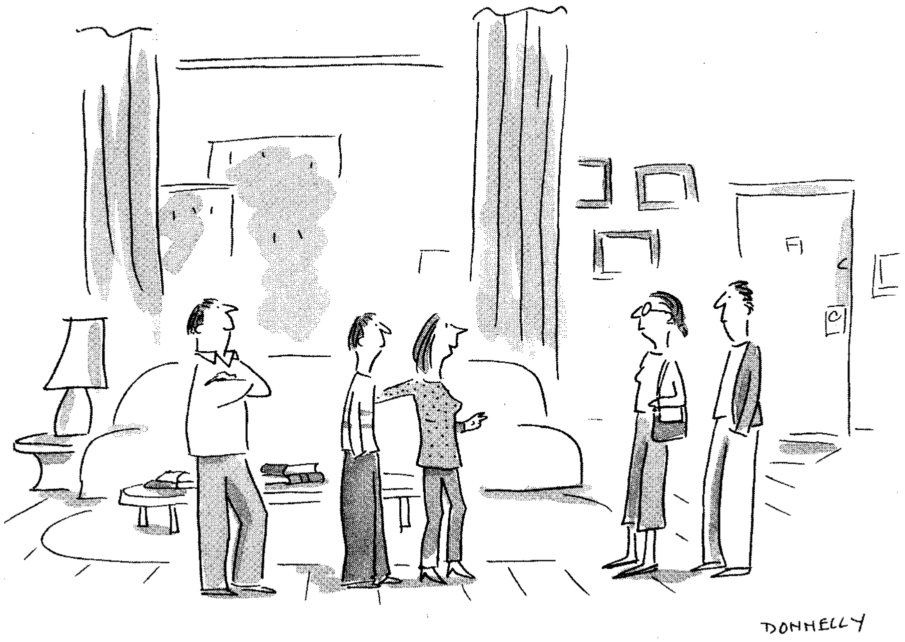
At the hospital, Bill, Jr., had registered under a pseudonym, to protect his privacy. He'd chosen the name Bob Wayne (who, as John Wayne fans know, was the Duke's brother). When I first saw him in his room, he looked deathly ill; moments later, he had tucked his hospital gown together, slipped off his oxygen tube, and started talking in his typical combative style.

Bill, Jr., voiced his firm support of the Iraq war, adding proudly that NASCAR fans have strong ties to the military. "People ask me who are the NASCAR fans," he said, "and, without blinking an eye, I say, 'They're the people that win wars for America.'" Talking about the key role that television has played in the sport's recent growth ("Television has let us take races in rural areas out to America"), he noted that the N.F.L. remained dominant in the ratings. "I don't want to see NASCAR get to the top," he said, al-



Mike Wallace at Daytona International Speedway, which Big Bill France opened in 1959. Photograph by Gilles Peress.

MAGNUM



"This is our son, Eddie. He's just graduated from school and is entering a void this fall."

• •

most convincingly. "The only place to go after that is down. You get cavalier when you get to the top. You always want to be climbing."

I asked him about the entrance of Toyota into NASCAR competition, another change that irks traditionalists, who point out that, according to the rule book, Winston Cup racing is open only to American automobiles. He chuckled. "The rule book—if it's antiquated, we'll change it," he said. "We're not going to live with a mistake." Bill, Jr., was no longer breaking the rules the way he once did—he has given up his four-pack-a-day cigarette habit, for example—but he seemed to relish the prospect of making up some new ones. "Shit, this is a world economy we're in right now," he said. "We're part of the world!"

The champion driver Richard Petty has said that racing began the day the second automobile was made, and he's not far off. In Daytona, in 1903, two vacationing auto manufacturers, Ransom Olds and Alexander Winton, raced their latest creations down the hard sand beaches at forty-eight m.p.h. Winton won that friendly match. The contest inspired Daytona's Speedweek, an annual attack on the landspeed records. In 1910, Barney Oldfield made it to a hundred and thirty-one m.p.h.; in 1929, Henry Seagrave hit two hundred and thirty-one.

The Indianapolis Motor Speedway opened in 1909, and immediately began attracting large crowds. At the same time, more casual races started taking place across America, at fairgrounds and horse tracks and on empty farmland. These rough competitions for local bragging rights were frequently won by bootleggers. As Tim Flock, a Georgia moonshine hauler and a two-time NASCAR champion, once said, "We didn't have no tickets, no safety equipment, no fences, no nothing. Just a bunch of these bootleggers who'd been arguing all week about who had the fastest car." A confusing array of sanctioning bodies tried to organize the events—the U.S.C.R.A. (United Stock Car Racing Association), the N.A.R.L. (National Auto Racing League), and the unfortunately named S.C.A.R.S. (Stock Car Auto Racing Society)—but the races remained haphazard affairs, and the drivers often arrived at the finish line to discover that promoters had run off with the prize money.

One event with a reputation for honesty was the hundred-and-sixty-mile Daytona road-and-beach race, which was overseen by an Amoco garage owner named William Henry Getty France (no relation to John Paul Getty—his parents just hoped he'd get rich). Big Bill France became a local hero in the thirties for bringing racing back to Daytona, after landspeed racers moved their world-record attempts to Utah's Bonneville Salt Flats. The racers at France's event drove stock cars, automobiles that originated as ordinary factory models. "We charged fifty cents for admission and five thousand people showed up," he once told a reporter. "We divided up two hundred dollars' profit. A month later, we tried again and charged a dollar. Another five thousand showed up, but our profit was two thousand dollars. That was a quick lesson in finance."

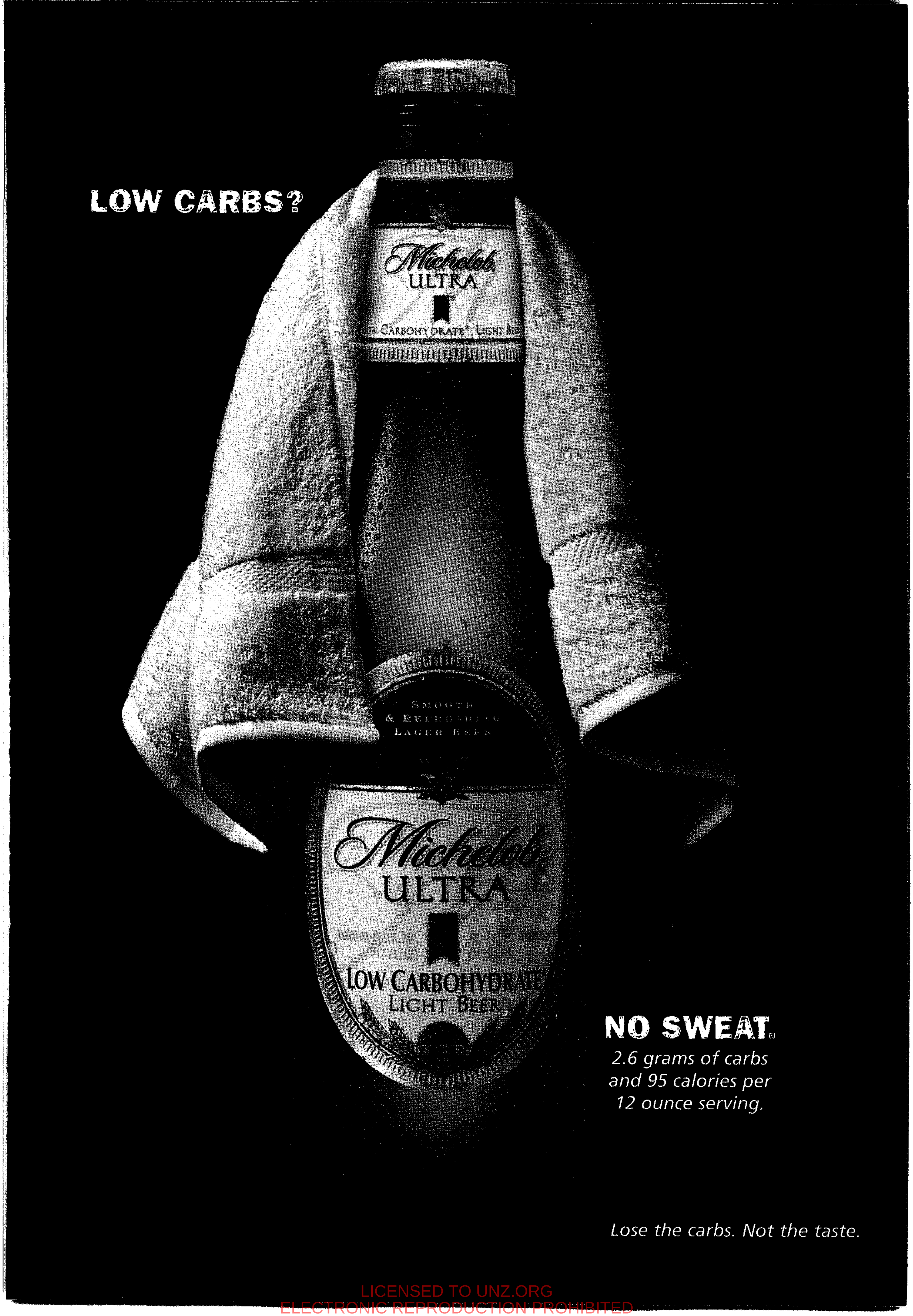
In December, 1947, Big Bill called thirty or so prominent racers to a meeting in a cocktail lounge on the top floor of the Streamline Hotel in Daytona Beach. He told the men that their sport was being hampered by shady race promoters. To solve the problem, he proposed creating a sanctioning body that would bank and guarantee the prize money for the races. The idea was embraced, and NASCAR was born.

Off the track, France was a friendly showman—Lesa, his granddaughter, remembers him once inviting strangers he met in an elevator to a race. On the track, he was a six-foot-six authority figure who could stare down guys named Possum, Banjo, and Cotton. The sport needed somebody who could be both.

The first NASCAR stock-car race took place at Charlotte Speedway, on June 19, 1949. An inspector spotted forbidden "bootlegger" springs in the winner's car, a '47 Ford, and France disqualified it, awarding the two-thousand-dollar prize to Jim Roper, who was three laps behind, in a '49 Lincoln. Hubert Westmoreland, the owner of the Ford, sued France for five thousand dollars in damages, but a local court dismissed the claim, affirming France's right to create and enforce the rules.

Drivers and mechanics immediately began dodging NASCAR's regulations. They put tires in the oven and cooked them. They cocked the rear of the car up and to the left, to improve handling in the turns. They built cars that were identical to others of their make but an eighth smaller. They called such practices "working the gray areas in the rule book."

In the sixties, the races grew from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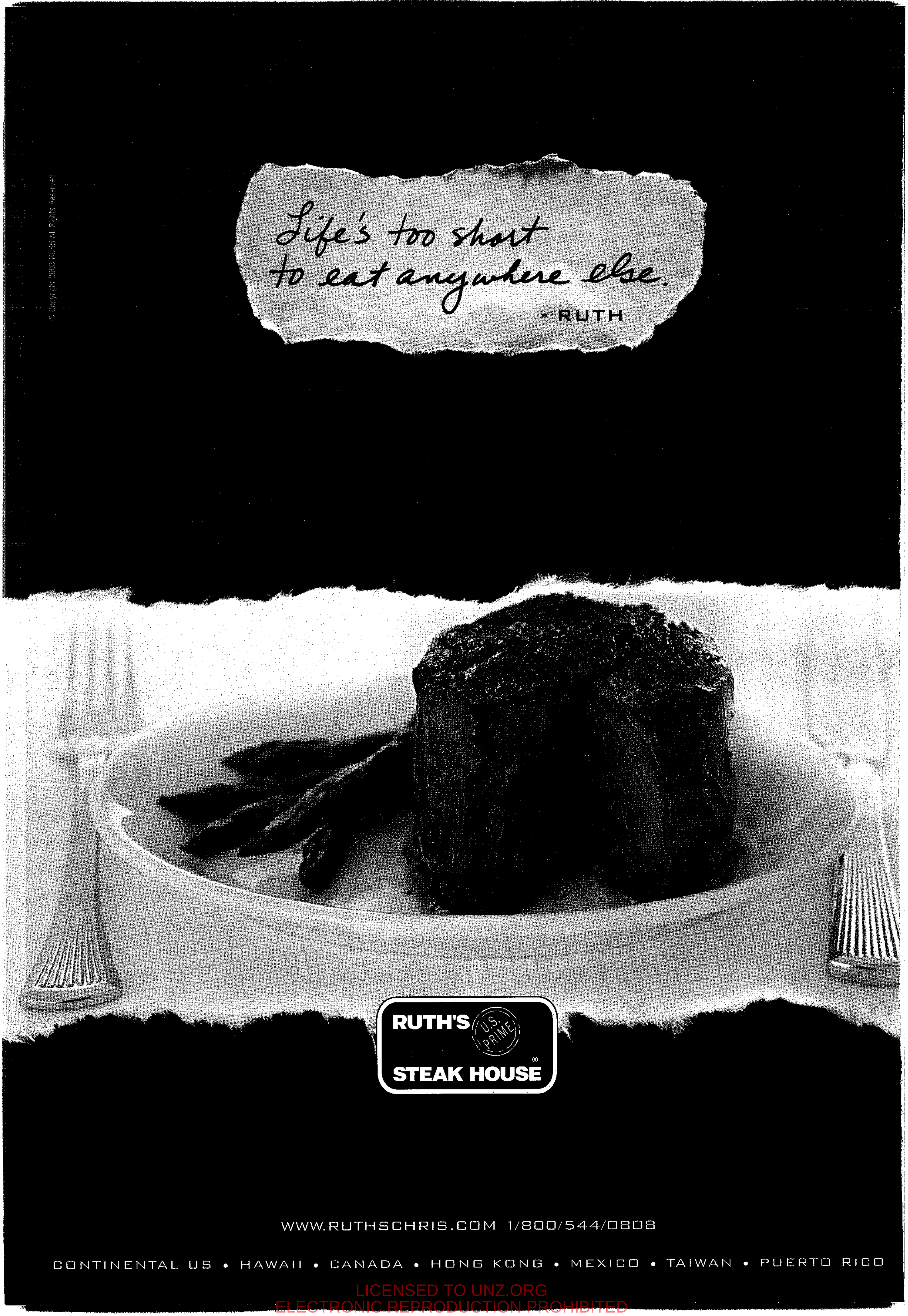
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short battles on dirt tracks to five-hundred-mile marathons on paved, banked tracks like the two-and-a-half-mile Daytona International Speedway, which Big Bill opened in 1959. Suddenly, mileage mattered. Mechanics hid extra fuel all over the car—in the frame rails, the roll bars, dashboard—allowing the cars to go farther between pit stops. On the minus side, the extra fuel sometimes exploded on impact, turning the car into a fireball.

NASCAR fans were almost as raucous as the drivers. On August 13, 1961, at Asheville-Weaverville Speedway, in North Carolina, officials ended the race just past the halfway point, when fresh pavement started breaking up and chunks of asphalt went flying into the crowd. Spectators rioted in protest, tossing one man into a nearby pond and holding drivers hostage inside the speedway until sundown, when everybody gave up and went home.

The cars and the tracks and the rules all changed together. Big Bill's first rulebook was one page long: it said that NASCAR allowed only readily available cars—the Lincoln, the Cadillac, the Hudson—with only minor alterations, using only parts that were in stock at the local garage. But NASCAR drivers were soon doing things to family cars that had never been done before, banging into each other in the corners and lifting off on the straightaways. With the lives of the drivers at stake, Big Bill began approving a lot of innovations just to keep the racing safe.

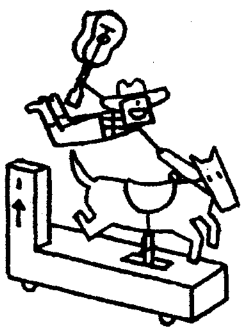
In 1964, following the death of the racing star Fireball Roberts, who succumbed to burns suffered in a crash at Charlotte Motor Speedway, Big Bill sanctioned a rubberized fuel tank that wouldn't leak and explode, and in 1966 he saw to it that roll cages were built into the frames of the cars. These changes brought an end to true stock-car racing and ushered in the era of look-alikes—crash-resistant vehicles that looked like factory cars but were designed to handle the stress of racing.

Few NASCAR fans are nostalgic for those older, slower cars. But they do reminisce about the first crop of hard-charging, big-drinking dirt racers. The man who embodied this ideal was Curtis Turner, a pioneer of intimidation behind the wheel, who raced and won hung over, in wing tips and a tie. He was known to slalom around the telephone poles on city streets. En route by private plane to a Charlotte racetrack in the sixties, it's said, he landed on a small-town road, had a few drinks with a friend, and then took off again, clipping a power line when he dipped a wing to salute some folks on the ground.

Around this time, Turner and his partners built a speedway in Charlotte. But almost as soon as it opened, Turner found himself running low on money, so he made a desperate deal with Jimmy Hoffa and the Teamsters, secretly promising to organize a drivers' union in exchange for financial backing. Big Bill heard about it and announced, "No known Teamster member can compete in a NASCAR race, and I'll use a pistol to enforce it." The drivers dropped their union plans, and France banned Turner from the sport for four years.

Curtis Turner died in a plane crash on a mountainside near Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, in 1970. Big Bill died in Daytona in 1992, at age eighty-two, after suffering from Alzheimer's. His bronze likeness—with one arm wrapped around his wife, Annie B.—greets crowds just outside Daytona U.S.A., the stock-car-racing museum.

Jim Rosenblum is the only NASCAR racing-team owner who lives within commuting distance of New York City; his home is in Mamaroneck, in Westchester County. He owns the fire-engine-red No. 28 F.D.N.Y. Chevy that competes in the Craftsman Truck Series, in NASCAR's version of the minor leagues. I recently asked Rosenblum to explain how a Winston Cup car differs from a family car.



"Well, there's no signals, no headlights, no tail-lights, no air bags, no windshield wipers," he told me. "It's got tires that you can't drive on the street. There's no tread on them, and, if I'm not mistaken, it says right on the tire, 'For Race Cars Only.' You're running high-octane fuel, so where are you going to buy gas? There's no electronics. There's only one seat. If you stop at a light, it'd overheat."

Winston Cup cars are fast but finicky. The chassis and the suspension system must be specially built for the different types of tracks—oval, egg-shaped, triangular. These custom setups, the educated guesswork of hundred-thousand-dollar-a-year mechanics, are then adjusted in the days before the race and fine-tuned during the event, in fifteen-second pit stops—and some weeks they still don't get it right. The seven-hundred-and-seventy-horsepower engines, which cost about seventy-five thousand dollars apiece, last for only one race and run at just under their mechanical breaking point: any less and a driver is left far behind; any more and the thing blows up.

According to Skip Barber, who founded a prominent racing school, these volatile machines demand very sensitive drivers. "The best ones can feel what the car is doing so much better than other people," Barber said. He told me that a good driver's sense of balance is so well honed that he can feel when the car is in danger of fishtailing around a turn or heading up out of a straightaway into the wall; he then reacts as if the machine were his own body.

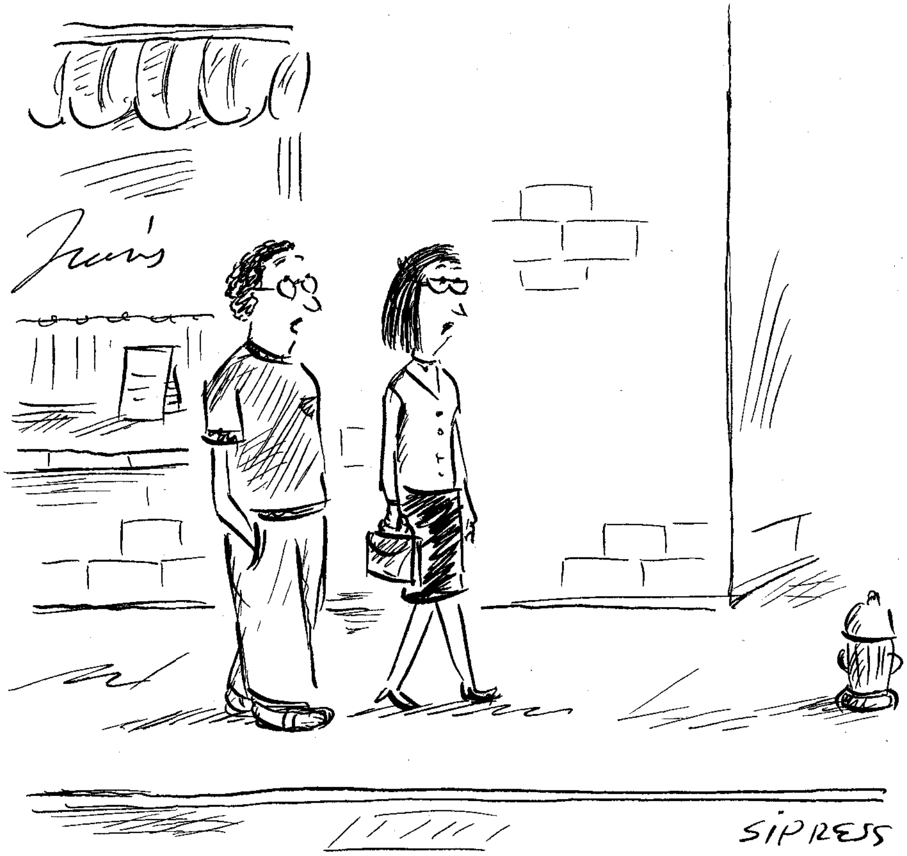
Whenever accidents happen in NASCAR races—the head-on crash into Turn Four; the barrel roll over the infield grass; the multicar pileup that drivers call "the Big One"—they wind up on the sports highlights of the nightly news. What's more astounding is how routinely a driver spins out, at a hundred and fifty m.p.h. or more, on a track that's three lanes wide, in the middle of forty-two other zooming cars, and *nothing happens*. The car whirls around in a plume of smoke, the other cars dodge it, and the driver brings it harmlessly to a stop on the apron. He then turns around and rejoins the race.

One thing that NASCAR's stock cars still have in common with family cars is fenders. Other racing machines, like Formula One and Indy cars, with their rocket-shaped bodies suspended between fat, exposed tires, go faster but can't stand much side-by-side contact—their tires will lock together, causing both cars to crash. Stock cars, however, absorb a lot of contact, which the drivers fondly call "rubbin'." The shorter and slower the track, the rougher such contact becomes; at old Dixie “bullrings” like Bristol and Martinsville the winning car often winds up looking like something from a demolition derby. With longer tracks—for example, the superspeedways, which are more than a mile long—more finesse is required. The contact, which is highly dangerous, is strictly supervised, both by NASCAR officials in the grandstand tower and by the drivers’ Old Testament-style code of retribution.

At the superspeedways in Daytona and in Talladega, Alabama, the tracks are so long and fast that the cars create a draft that has a surprising aerodynamic property. The competitors move faster when they’re very close together, just as in cycling, and those who are behind greatly benefit from the speed of those who are in front. But in NASCAR racing the reverse is also true: the trailing car makes the *lead* car go faster. The two cars cut through the wind as a single entity—one that is powered by multiple engines. This aerodynamic effect increases as more cars join the line, eventually creating a draft so strong that inferior cars a quarter of a mile behind the leaders get sucked in and pulled along. (Indy cars, with their extremely sleek designs, displace much less air, so this effect barely registers on them.)

At the superspeedways, drivers are so careful about avoiding contact that the races appear delicate, almost balletic. The drivers switch from line to line, searching for the strongest cars to buddy with; gangs of cars drive together to the front, then dissolve their alliances in a series of complex betrayals at a hundred and ninety m.p.h.

Many viewers look at the tight packs of Fords and Chevys and see only rush-hour traffic. This is the big drawback of using stock cars: it’s hard to think of somebody driving a Ford Taurus as an athlete. Still, Felix Sabates, a part owner of three Winston Cup teams who also has a stake in the N.B.A. franchise in Charlotte, told me that he considers the two sports comparable. “If I was to go in the trenches in Iraq, and I had my choice of four NASCAR drivers or four N.B.A. players, I’d take the drivers,” he said. “Physically and mentally, they’d be tougher. I’m not taking anything away from basketball players. But anybody that can race for five hundred miles, two inches apart, and bump with the next guy, knowing that your life could be over in two seconds? I want him in the foxhole with me.”



“Of course I want to have kids, Claire—just not all the time.”

Bill, Jr.,’s wife, Betty Jane France, wanted to set the record straight. “Somebody should do a movie about the way NASCAR really was,” she told me. “It was quite glamorous, actually. It wasn’t that moonshine, redneck stuff when I got into it.” She was sitting in the sunroom of her Mission-style home, which faces Daytona’s intercoastal waterway. As we talked, a man in a toque served us red velvet cake. Betty Jane, whose blond hair was arranged in an upsweep, wore a black blouse and tailored black leather pants; her face was set off by a chandelier-design gold necklace, and she wore two diamond rings that were only slightly smaller than the knob on a stick shift. Speaking in a smoky voice that was both poised and down-home, she recalled visits from several Presidents, elegant functions at the Iranian Embassy, a meeting with King Hussein in her Daytona suite, an encounter with Engelbert Humperdinck. “I wish my kids could have participated in that,” she said. “They’re such workaholics. At their age, I was having fun.”

Betty Jane and Bill, Jr., met in 1956, when he signed her up for a beauty contest, at Bowman-Gray Stadium, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. She won. Betty Jane then travelled to Daytona Beach to face other racetrack beauty queens in the Miss NASCAR contest. As she recalled, she arrived in Daytona not knowing anything “about NASCAR or stock cars, so it was quite a jolt.” She then quoted a joke that her father-in-law once made: she did not win Miss NASCAR but she did win NASCAR.

Betty Jane and Bill, Jr., were married in 1957. Soon afterward, she tried working alongside her mother-in-law, Annie B., who was as shy as Big Bill was outgoing, and who was in charge of bookkeeping and ticket sales. But Betty Jane was temperamentally closer to her father-in-law, and Big Bill asked her, as she said, “to expand the social part of it.” She brought the wives in; she threw parties with flower arrangements and seating plans; and she brought in the Junior League to meet corporate sponsors at a "big coffee." ("It was like a tea, but it was a coffee," she said.)

In his own way, Bill, Jr., worked toward the same end. One of his smartest practical decisions was fixing the sport's toilet problem. The rest rooms at early NASCAR racetracks were woefully inadequate. Darlington Raceway, in South Carolina, which opened in 1950, had only one, almost guaranteeing a male-only crowd. Bill, Jr., realized that if he hoped to bring in women, things had to change—and his racetracks were outfitted with hundreds of rest rooms.

When Bill, Jr., took over from Big Bill, in 1972, NASCAR's television presence was limited to highlights on ABC's "Wide World of Sports." But in February, 1979, CBS broadcast the entire Daytona 500 and was rewarded with fifteen million viewers (a blizzard had kept much of the country indoors). They watched a race that ended with a last-lap crash, followed by a fistfight between Cale Yarborough and the Allison boys, Bobby and Donnie. Two years later, the fledgling cable network ESPN started filling airtime with NASCAR races; as cable grew, so did NASCAR's national recognition. In 2001, Bill, Jr., negotiated a deal that put almost all of the Winston Cup schedule on network television: fifteen races on Fox, thirteen on NBC.

When NASCAR was in its infancy, drivers got sponsorship support from regional poultry chains, local auto-parts stores, or outboard-motor manufacturers. The car companies Ford, Chevy, and Dodge were off-and-on participants. But in 1971, after a federal law prohibited cigarette companies from advertising on television, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco decided to use some of its substantial advertising budget to sponsor the entire sport; they soon beefed up weekly purses and the championship fund. In return, NASCAR changed the name of its premier series from the Grand Nationals to the Winston Cup.

For years, Winston's brand share has been five times higher among NASCAR fans than it is among the general public. This success encouraged other companies to sponsor race teams. Soon, race cars were covered in logos for beer, tools, motor oil, and chewing tobacco. In 1984, Procter & Gamble entered the race, and soon it was sponsoring the Crisco T-Bird and the Tide and Folgers Monte Carlos. These household products enjoyed a big boost in sales, and marketers began to view NASCAR as an effective means of reaching the primary decision-makers of American family shopping: women. Now, when the gentlemen start their engines, Cheerios, Rubbermaid, and Target cars line up beside competitors from Bud, Coors, and Goodwrench.

REASSIGNED PENDING AN INVESTIGATION

At first, sponsors simply gave money to a promising driver, hoping that their logo would appear in victory-celebration photographs. Now direct support of a racing team is only part of a sponsor's participation. Earlier this year, Budweiser signed what is reported to be a three-year, sixty-million-dollar contract to continue as Dale Earnhardt, Jr.,'s primary sponsor. Budweiser promotes its driver (and simultaneously advertises for NASCAR) not just by running TV commercials but also by installing life-size cutouts of Dale Earnhardt, Jr., near Bud displays in stores across the country; by bringing replicas of Earnhardt's No. 8 Budweiser Chevy to shopping malls, often in exchange for end-aisle display of Anheuser-Busch items; and by rewarding business partners with trips to luxury suites at NASCAR tracks.

NASCAR reaches an increasingly national audience of upper-middle-class suburban homeowners. The demographic is heavy with two-income blue-collar families. (Politicians are betting that NASCAR fans will be crucial swing voters in next year's Presidential election; last month, a truck painted with a "Bob Graham for President" logo won its first NASCAR race.) From a sponsor's point of view, NASCAR is an ideal sport. It has a longer season than basketball or baseball, and it isn't saddled with the marketing problem of home-town loyalties, the way that the N.F.L. is. And NASCAR fans reward the sponsors with a brand loyalty unrivalled by any other sport; a Dale Earnhardt, Jr., fan is far more likely to choose Budweiser than is, say, a football fan who watches Bud Bowl commercials during the Super Bowl. During a visit to the Daytona infield in February, I watched a group of shirtless, sunburned young men faithfully raising their Buds every time Dale, Jr., drove through Turn Three. (The race was a hundred and twenty laps.) One of the largest guys in the gang, who'd come down from Toronto, said, "You can call me Bacon, because I'm bakin'." Then he put his arm around me and offered me a Bud.

By 7 A.M. on a race-day morning, the cooks are busy down at the stock-car garage. They work on anything from small Weber grills to professional ranges set up behind the team haulers—the fifty-five-foot-long travelling machine shops that can store two racecars on an overhead rack, with space below for multiple engines, half-ton workstations and tool trolleys, and built-in cabinets for arcane parts and tools like the tube clip and the snap punch. The crews stop by, grab some breakfast, and eat while walking from the hauler to the car, socializing over plastic plates of grits, sausage, eggs, and bacon.

Soon, the squads of pit-touring civilians in Goodyear windbreakers and AC Delco polo shirts begin trailing through the garage. Cryptic checklists are taped to the doors of the cars: "set toe," "tighten rod sleeves." Although the cars are based on top-selling models—the Dodge Intrepid, the Pontiac Grand Prix—these are not cars you could lose track of at the mall, with all the decals and paint schemes: blacktop-black on yellow-line yellow; dark blue with flames; a bull's-eye of sunburst colors.

At Daytona, you can sense Betty Jane's impact on racing society. As starting time approaches, the garage turns into a parking-lot version of a garden party, with well-dressed families and sponsors and a trail of curiosity-seeking celebs milling around. (John Travolta, Evander Holyfield, and Mariah Carey showed up for the 500.) Meanwhile, team members dressed in what Dale Earnhardt, Jr., calls "tight-fittin', lady-pleasin' firesuits" push carts filled with tires or huge red gas cans over to the pits, the lineup of stalls where drivers get adjustments during a race.

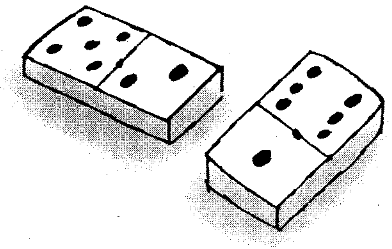
At about five minutes to noon, as if on cue, the tallest, blondest women head off together. Follow them, and you wind up in an unused garage, where they join their driver husbands or boyfriends for pre-race prayer. During the service, the driver sits quietly with his child on his lap, or holds hands with his wife. Death is a shadow figure at every race—it gives the sport an emotional gravity that you don't find in, say, baseball—and the presence of the driver's family provides a final moment of refuge before the race.

Many drivers' children grow up at the races; quite a few enter the profession, and stock-car racing is full of family dynasties. In 1998, when NASCAR issued a list of its top fifty drivers of all time, ten entries were father-son combinations: Lee and Richard Petty, Bobby and Davey Allison, Ned and Dale Jarrett, Ralph and Dale Earnhardt, and Buck and Buddy Baker. These connections can amplify the sense of tragedy when an accident occurs: Bobby Allison lost both of his sons, Davey in a helicopter crash at Talladega, Clifford in a practice run at Michigan International Speedway. Sometimes, these kinships provide solace: on July 8, 2001, Dale Earnhardt, Jr., won the Pepsi 400 on the same track where his father had died five months earlier.

Races typically begin in the early afternoon. Forty-three drivers start their engines at once, and the resulting sound is thunderous; at a high-banked half-mile track like the one in Bristol, Tennessee, the echo-chamber acoustics concentrate the effect, and the roar penetrates the brain so deeply that fans can feel as if an aneurysm is bursting—for four hours. Most racegoers love this feeling, although practically everyone uses earplugs, headphones, or some other means to deaden the sensation.

Headphones, along with a police radio and a list of broadcast frequencies that racegoers can purchase upon entering the track, allow fans to listen in on team communications—which are, by NASCAR rules, accessible to the public—throughout the race. Most of the chatter is strategic: a spotter high up in the grandstand tells a driver whether to drive high or low in order to avoid a wreck ahead of him; a crew chief and a driver confer on the timing of pit stops. Sometimes, after a pit screwup or a "rubbin'" incident, you can listen to a driver cursing or vowing revenge. In the stands, fans tuned to that driver's frequency rip off their headphones and share this unedited road rage with their friends.

Tickets to a NASCAR race cost more than seats at a football or baseball game. And it's now possible to attend a NASCAR event in entirely corporate surroundings, and move from V.I.P. parking to hospitality tent to luxury suite without ever running into a redneck. But this would be like visiting New Orleans at Mardi Gras and skipping the parades.



When I visited the Daytona infield, guys on a jerry-built platform over a pickup truck hollered "Boobs for beer" at a girl in a beads-and-tube-top outfit with a polka-dot thong peeking out of her Daisy Duke shorts. She turned to mouth "Bye" as she walked past the boys, clinging to the arm of her male companion. A woman in a red bikini top and a matching Dale, Jr., bolero jacket introduced me to her brother from Bethpage, Long Island—who was so sure Junior wouldn't win that he promised her his Camaro if he did. (Junior lost; the victor was Michael Waltrip.) The gang on the platform invited me up for a beer. "That's my buddy," one said, by way of introduction. "That's my brother. That's my buddy's sister's son." After some chitchat about the race, he shared his surefire NASCAR merchandising idea: "Temporary tattoos!"

In 1981, NASCAR moved its championship banquet from Daytona Beach to New York City. At first, it was awkward. The hotel demanded payment in advance, and the drivers were reluctant to wear tuxedos. And when the maître d' at "21" tried to put a necktie on the legendary driver Junior Johnson, he walked out and ate a hot dog on the street.

Now NASCAR is hoping to build a track in the New York City area. Brian France, who estimates that he spent sixty nights in Manhattan on business last year (he likes to dine at La Grenouille), has said that staging a Winston Cup race in New York is his top priority, and the family has made Donald Trump its local representative in the search for a suitable venue.

The Frances have various reasons for targeting New York. "It's the largest market, period, in terms of population density," Brian told me. "It's the largest media market. And it's the largest home base for corporations that drive NASCAR." Lesa, who has helped the I.S.C. open tracks in or near Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Chicago, said, "I definitely think that our television partners would see it as a favorable move.”

David Hill, the chairman of Fox Sports, agreed. “We believe the sport has just started its growth,” he told me. “And the three key markets where there’s room to grow are New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago—the No. 1, No. 2, and No. 3 markets in the country.”

Jim France likes to talk about the NASCAR “conversion experience”—the way first-timers turn into fans once they come out to the track and experience all the noise, the speed, the fumes. “It’s like going to New York,” he said. “You just can’t go there without getting a shot of adrenaline.”

The problems the Frances have encountered in their search for a track will sound familiar to New Yorkers. The places they like that are close to the city are smaller than the ones they’re used to; the bigger sites are too far away. And everything’s so expensive. “We’ve been looking, looking, looking,” Bill, Jr., told me. “But we’re still plugging away. We plugged away at Daytona for six years before we finally got to do it.”

The Frances dropped by Times Square in June to make the Nextel Cup announcement. The deal with the telecommunications giant will last ten years, and is worth seven hundred million dollars. Bill, Jr., was in high spirits as he read his speech, skipping over words he didn’t feel like pronouncing (“unprecedented”) and chuckling at his infirmities (“When you’re seventy years old, wearing bifocals, it’s a pain to read a speech”).

The decision to drop Winston could be seen as a favor of sorts—Reynolds has been suffering heavy losses lately. But it’s more likely that NASCAR was no longer willing to put up with Reynolds’s advertising limitations. Nextel will be able to promote the series on TV, in merchandising, and in trailers at movie theatres. The pairing is not as odd as it may seem: NASCAR has always been a tech-friendly sport, and soon its increasing number of info-geek fans may be able to call up lap times on their Blackberrys, or listen to racetrack chatter on their data-capable digital handsets.

The next major change for NASCAR will be the anointing of Bill, Jr.,’s successor. In recent years, Bill, Jr., has given up some of his job titles (he is no longer the president of NASCAR) and relinquished power to subordinates, but he still has the final word on important decisions. The question is, which France will take over when he’s gone: Jim, Brian, or Lesa? Of the two France children, Lesa is considered the more intellectual one: she has an economics degree from Duke; Brian attended the University of Central Florida but didn’t graduate. Investors aren’t worried about the final choice, however. “They all think alike,” Bob Simonson, a securities analyst who follows the racing industry, told me. “It’s not like one of them’s going to say, ‘Now, we’re going to sell air-conditioners at the track.’ ”

Continuity, of course, is the strength of a family business. Brian and Lesa talked to me about their father’s gift for strategy, just as Bill, Jr., spoke warmly of his father’s vision and management style. This devotion is sincere. According to Felix Sabates, one of Bill, Jr.,’s closest friends, Bill, Jr., continued to consult his dad on business decisions even after Big Bill developed Alzheimer’s and “wasn’t in this world anymore.”

The official archive of stock-car racing, in Daytona, is a well-funded but haphazard affair with yellowing NASCAR newsclips crammed in file drawers. It is a mile from the Speedway, hidden behind the electronic gate of a well-tended estate. The archive, which is filled with loose snapshots of the Frances, has the feel of a family attic.

Several years ago, the Frances chose to re-create Big Bill’s panelled office here, down to the faux-antique globe that opens up to reveal a decanter of Chivas Regal. These artifacts convey his mid-century machismo (a pillow with the phrase “I Did It My Way” in needlepoint sits on a chair) and goofball showmanship (a tuxedo jacket that Big Bill had made from racecar-patterned drapes hangs next to a photo of him wearing it). There is also a silver plaque, leaning against a mostly empty bookshelf, engraved with the France family secret: “Money isn’t everything, but it does tend to keep the children in touch.” ♦

NO COMMENT DEPT.

From the newsletter of Central Michigan University.

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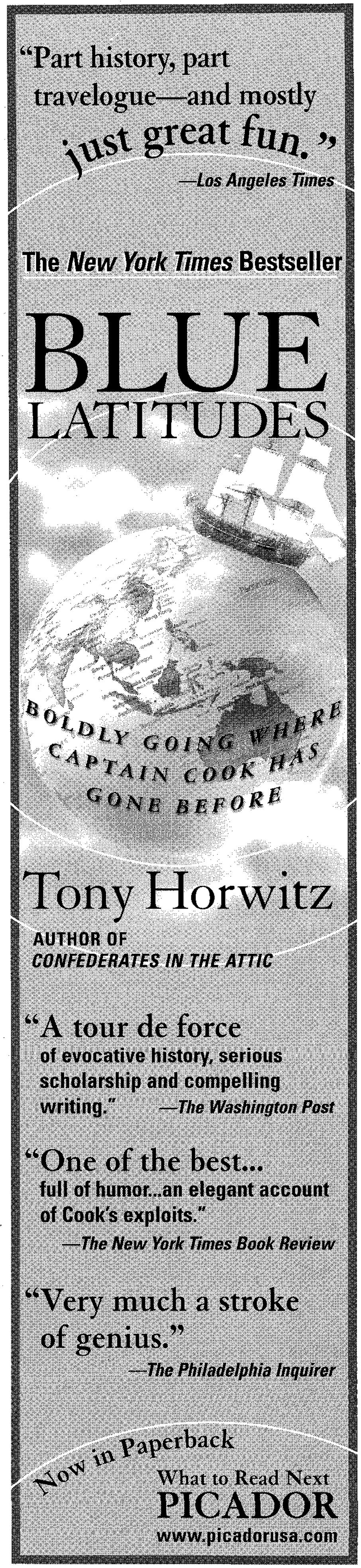

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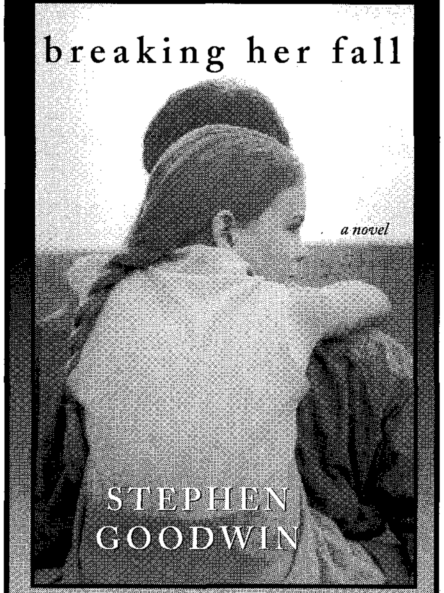

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LIFE AND LETTERS

LOVE IN VENICE

Great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, his lover, and Casanova.

BY ANDREA DI ROBILANT

Palazzo Mocenigo stands where the Grand Canal begins its final turn before heading to the Basin of St. Mark's, *in volta di canal*, the Venetians say—in the waterway's bend. It is not the most beautiful palazzo on the canal, or the most imposing. Its plain gray façade, renovated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, looks worn.

Still, for more than four hundred years the Mocenigos were one of the wealthiest and most powerful families of the Venetian Republic. Seven Mocenigos held the office of doge, the highest political office in Venice. Mocenigo admirals led the Venetian fleet against the Turks; Mocenigo diplomats insured Venice's dominance of the Mediterranean. There were less glorious episodes, too, as when a Giovanni Mocenigo invited Giordano Bruno, the renegade Dominican philosopher, to stay with him in the family palazzo, and then handed him over to the Inquisition. Bruno was burned at the stake in 1600, and it is said that his ghost still haunts the palazzo.

The Venetian Republic collapsed in 1797, after Napoleon's invasion of northern Italy, and the Mocenigos, like all the old patricians, lost their prominence. The palazzo fell into disrepair, but its derelict atmosphere appealed to Lord Byron, and he leased it in 1818. He wrote the first cantos of "Don Juan" there, seduced countless Venetian women, and argued with the Shelleys over his neglect of his daughter, Clara Allegra. In the entrance hall, he kept a noisy menagerie of caged animals, including two monkeys, a fox, and a wolf.

My grandfather, also called Andrea di Robilant—whose father married into the Mocenigo family—inherited Palazzo Mocenigo and a substantial sum of money from two reclusive elderly aunts in 1919; he was twenty and had just returned from fighting the Austrians in the First World War. The following year, he married Gabriella de Bosdari, and they reinvigorated the musty palazzo. On the day of their arrival, they distributed bread, wine, and small coins in the neighborhood.

In the twenties, my grandfather hosted extravagant balls, sparing no expense to entertain his guests—international sophisticates who stopped in Venice at the end of the summer. The socialite Elsa Maxwell once spoiled a party by taking the revered Mocenigo *corno*, the horned ducal cap, from its glass case in the hall, putting it on her head, and prancing into the ballroom. Cole Porter, who rented a palazzo across the canal, liked to sit at the grand piano when the dancing was over and play his favorite melodies for the remaining guests.

My father grew up in Palazzo Mocenigo, and captivated my brothers and me with stories from what seemed an enchanted childhood—there were gondola rides and children's tea parties and picnics at the Lido, and the grownups always seemed to be drinking champagne and wearing evening clothes. But by the nineteen-thirties the Mocenigo fortune was gone, and my father, who died several years ago, had painful memories of the many auctions in which works by Tintoretto, Bronzino, Perugino, Ghirlandaio, Sebastiano Ricci, Guido Reni, Luca Giordano, and Pompeo Batoni were put up for sale. (One of my brothers recently bought on the Internet the catalogue of a six-day sale of pictures and furniture from Palazzo Mocenigo, held in May of 1933.) Even that was not enough to pay my grandfather's debts. He sold the palazzo floor by floor to wealthy Venetians, severing the family ties to Venice. Although my father never lived in Venice again, he frequently made pilgrimages to the palazzo, where we still had a few old boxes and crates in the attic.

Some years ago, my father arrived at our country house in Tuscany with a carton of letters he had retrieved from the attic on one such trip. They were undated

Letters found in the family palazzo turned out to be the missing part of the story.

GERALD SCARFE

but were obviously quite old—frayed and stained with wax marks and what looked like purplish traces of wine. Some pages were written in code, a strange hieroglyphic of dots and circles and tiny geometrical figures. My father and I spent a rainy weekend trying to make sense of some of the fragments. "Yes, you are my delight, my only happiness, my all, my adorable one," said one. "Take courage, things will soon look up." Another letter began with the appeal "Come to me soon, or else I shall die!" Among the hundred or so letters was one in a different hand, signed "Giustiniana Wynne," and explaining that she was returning the letters and asking to have hers back so that she could "burn them all" and destroy the evidence of the correspondence.

Over the next couple of years, my father painstakingly deciphered and transcribed all the letters. The author, he realized, was Andrea Memmo, my great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, a member of one of Venice's most prestigious families. Andrea's ancestors had been among the founders of Venice, in the eighth century, and he was expected to marry a woman of his station and have a career in government. Giustiniana Wynne, to whom the letters were addressed, had been born out of wedlock to an Englishman and a Venetian woman of Greek origin. For nearly five years in the seventeen-fifties, during the last act of the Republic, which was a time of great artistic flowering and social decadence, Andrea and Giustiniana had an affair that was gossiped about all over Venice.

The city was a secretive place, governed by a conservative body of interlocking councils and commissions whose members were drawn from the most powerful families. Masks, originally worn only during Carnival, had become—like wigs and fans and beauty marks—an integral part of Venetian attire and a symbol of the city's culture, with its strict rules and peculiar customs. There were two styles: the more casual, flat mask that covered only the eyes, and the "cloaked" mask, or domino, which hid the entire head and neck down to the shoulders. Venetians were allowed to wear masks in public from October until Lent, with the exception of the nine-day period of prayer before Christmas, and they all did so, from the doge down to the women selling vegetables at the market.

The marriage practices of the time were no less idiosyncratic. The ruling class was exclusive, and reluctant to admit new members to its official register, the Golden Book. Intrigues and flirtations between patricians and lower-born women were fairly common, and were even encouraged by the authorities as an outlet for energies that might otherwise be directed against the political establishment. But these were generally superficial dalliances that ended quickly, and never to the woman's advantage. Affairs between young noblemen and married women were also condoned—as long as the women, too, were patricians.

As my father continued his research, he found mentions of the romance in the public archives in Venice, Padua, and even Paris and London. Students of eighteenth-century Venice had learned of it through the memoirs of Giacomo Casanova, "History of My Life," which he wrote as an old man, in the late seventeen-eighties and the seventeen-nineties, while serving as the librarian at the castle of Dux, in Bohemia. The twelve volumes of Casanova's memoirs are full of wild tales of his adventurous life and his many amorous exploits, and contain passing references to Andrea and Giustiniana's affair. Casanova was a close friend of Andrea's, and they often stayed out late drinking Malmsey and playing cards at one of the popular *malvasie.* Casanova also devotes a number of pages to Giustiniana, whom he first met when she was fifteen. "Her character," he notes, "was already delineated to perfection in her beautiful face." Elsewhere in his memoirs, he writes extensively about a desirable woman he calls Mademoiselle XCV; in 1910, the Viennese Casanova scholar Gustav Gugitz identified Mademoiselle XCV as Giustiniana.

In the twenties, Bruno Brunelli, a Venetian historian, found in the archives in Padua two small volumes of handwritten copies of letters from Giustiniana to Andrea, which cover the early courtship and the period from June, 1759, to November, 1760, when Giustiniana was living in Paris and London. (The copies appear to date from the late seventeen-hundreds, and the identity of the scribe is unknown.) Brunelli wrote a book based on those letters, "Casanova Loved Her," which was published in 1924, and speculated that the absence of any correspondence from Andrea indicated that he lacked "the temperament of a great lover." In the early nineteen-fifties, an American diplomat and Casanova specialist named James Rives Childs bought from a private dealer in Venice a set of Giustiniana's letters to Andrea, including some written during her trip through Italy and France and her first six months in Paris. More recently, a third copy, identical to Childs's except for the handwriting, turned up in a private Genovese collection. And still none of Andrea's letters surfaced.

My father's discovery in the attic of the family palazzo turned out to be the missing part of the story. Beginning with the lovers' first schemes about where and when and how to meet, Andrea's letters reveal an exuberant and audacious young patrician who was deeply in love—and they certainly disprove Brunelli's contention about Andrea's capacity for emotional drama. Yet they also show a poignant conflict: Andrea's love for Giustiniana competed with a strong sense of duty to his family and to the institutions of the Republic.

Andrea and Giustiniana met sometime in late 1753 at the house of Joseph Smith, a rich English merchant and art collector, whose drawing room was frequently full of fashionable artists, intellectuals, and foreigners. Andrea was twenty-four; Giustiniana was not yet seventeen. A portrait by Angelica Kauffmann painted in later years depicts Andrea as tall and vigorous, with a long aquiline nose. Rigorously schooled in philosophy, economics, and architecture, he carried himself with the self-confidence of his class.

Giustiniana, too, stood out in the eclectic crowd. She was charming, clever, and a little exotic, with Mediterranean good looks and a lively manner. Her father, Sir Richard Wynne, was an English nobleman who had come to Venice after the death of his first wife. His gondolier had introduced him to Giustiniana's mother, Anna Gazzini, a Greek-born Venetian of dubious lineage. Two and a half years after Giustiniana was born, they married, and went on to have five more children, two boys and three girls, one of whom died at the age of two. (In 1745, when Giustiniana was eight years old, Sir Richard took steps to legitimatize her birth.) Sir Richard died in 1751, leaving the family a moderate inheritance.

Andrea and Giustiniana acted indiscreetly in the first weeks of their romance, meeting at the Listone in Piazza San Marco, at the Ridotto, where Venetians went to gamble, and even near the modest house that the Wynnes rented on the Grand Canal. Mrs. Wynne was displeased about her daughter's infatuation. Ever since her husband's death, she had felt the precariousness of being a foreigner with an uncertain pedigree. She and her family resided in Venice at the pleasure of the authorities, and their permits could be revoked if they irritated anyone or caused a scandal. Assuming that Andrea would take advantage of her daughter and then abandon her, she forbade them to see each other.

Andrea deplored what he described as his "*cacciata funesta*," his fateful banishment, though he pointed out to Giustiniana that the atmosphere of disapproval was encouraging them to be "even more obstinate" about their romance. Enlisting servants and the Memmo gondoliers to convey messages back and forth, they wrote to each other several times a day, recounting in detail their activities, gossiping, describing their feelings, and planning trysts. If Mrs. Wynne was at home, Andrea's notes were left at "the usual *bottega*," a grocer's near Giustiniana's house. When Andrea couldn't wait to see her, he visited his friends at Ca' Tiepolo, a stately palazzo separated by a narrow waterway from the Wynnes' house. The side window of the mezzanine looked directly across to the Wynnes' balcony. "After lunch," Andrea advised Giustiniana in one note, "do your usual scene and then come out on the balcony. But for heaven's sake be careful about your mother. And don't force me to edge out too close to the windowsill because she will certainly see me."

Andrea liked to spy on Giustiniana with a portable telescope. He pointed it in the direction of her balcony from a little square about a hundred yards away, across the Grand Canal. "Today I admired you with my *canocchiale*," he announced to her mischievously. "I don't really care if your mother saw me. . . . After all, the rules merely state that I cannot come into your house and that I cannot write to you."

As a general strategy, Andrea felt it was important to convince Mrs. Wynne that their love had subsided. Whenever she took her daughter to a place where they might see Andrea, Giustiniana was to feign a complete lack of interest:

> Sometimes, in taking risks, one must be willing to be *la dupe de soi-même*. So arrange things in such a way that she will feel she is forcing you to go to all the places where she knows you might run into me, such as San Benetto or at the Ridotto. . . . To avoid coming to San Benetto all you have to do is tell her you don't feel well. As for the Ridotto, you can say: "In truth, Mother, it bores me too much. Besides we have no one to speak to and I don't feel like playing. And we don't make a good impression anyway, walking around with no other company. So let me go to bed." And if she refuses and takes you out with her you will see me and she will say, "Giustiniana does not fret about Memmo anymore."

The lovers developed their own sign language, so they could communicate from a distance. "Touch your hair if you are going to the Ridotto," Andrea instructed her. "Nod or shake your head to tell me whether you plan to go to the piazza." He wrote, "When you left the theatre, you signalled to me just as your mother turned around and I think she might have noticed that. If this were the case it could damage us since, in addition, she might also have noticed all the other gestures we had made to each other from our boxes."

Andrea fretted constantly about the risks of their writing to each other. If the correspondence ever fell into the wrong hands, there would be an explosion "that would reduce everything to a pile of rubble." Still, he overwhelmed Giustiniana with letters and notes, often filling them with practical advice and detailed descriptions of his frantic chases around town. “We are completely mad! If only you knew how afraid I am that your mother might find out we are seeing each other again.”

It is easy to imagine how, in a masked city, the language of the eyes became critical, and what was true in general was especially true for Andrea and Giustiniana, because of the restrictions that had been imposed on them. Andrea was speaking literally when he said, “Today my lips will not be able to tell you how much I love you. . . . But there will be other ways. . . . Will you understand what my eyes will be saying to you?”

Two years into their relationship, the lovers came up with a plan to marry Giustiniana to Joseph Smith. The hope was that, with Giustiniana respectably wed, she and Andrea would be able to see each other more freely, maybe even in Smith’s drawing room, where they had first met. The lovers tried to be especially furtive during this period, but Smith, suspecting that their relationship hadn’t ended, married someone else. Mrs. Wynne was furious, and Andrea and Giustiniana were in despair.

Finally, in the summer of 1757, Andrea began to contemplate marrying Giustiniana himself. He had always assumed that a marriage contract would never be approved by the *avogadori di comun*, the panel of three officials which had jurisdiction over such matters. But, after talking privately to a legal scholar and a lawyer friend, he grew confident that the Venetian authorities would accept the contract if the two families agreed to endorse it before it was presented.

Throughout the fall of 1757, Andrea used his considerable diplomatic skills to persuade his parents to support the marriage, working first on his father, who had the weaker personality. Andrea’s father finally gave his consent, and his mother acquiesced soon afterward.

Andrea had expected that Mrs. Wynne, who had fiercely discouraged the relationship, would be the main obstacle. But when she realized that the Memmos would not try to block the contract she, too, hesitantly agreed. Nevertheless, erratic and opportunistic, she did what she could to disrupt the negotiations. In the winter of 1758, when the contract was close to complete, she contrived to have Giustiniana meet a handsome French count who was visiting for Carnival, and encouraged her to accompany him to public celebrations and dances. Angrily, Andrea complained to Giustiniana that she had been seen kissing the Frenchman, not lightly on the lips—the French style—but “in the much more fervent Italian manner.” “Listen to me,” he warned her bitterly in another letter:

> We all saw your mother rise from an unhappy and miserable station to become the wife of an English Chevalier. Your mother does not have the best reputation. You have nasty relatives and little dowry. You are a Catholic and therefore one assumes nobody will want you back in England or in any case you will choose not to go. Your education does not please. The liberties you take are viewed with suspicion. You are a bright girl. How easy it would be for anyone—a man or, better still, a woman—to believe that all this time you have cultivated me out of self-interest when they see a nice young Frenchman . . . make love to you and ply you with gallantries and draw sighs from you at a time when you should be particularly respectful of me. . . . Oh, never mind, but let this be the last “distraction” before our wedding. This time I will consider you innocent—I will not infer from this episode an easy yearning to please on

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> your part or an overconfident attitude towards your Memmo in love, always good to you, full of respect for you and blindly faithful. But if it happens again I promise nothing. . . . Remember that I marry you for boundless love and deep esteem, and for this very reason I am convinced that my eternal happiness can only come from you. And that the only dowry you bring to me is your love, so perfectly sincere, and a character worthy of all my admiration. Remember that I give to you the love of my Father, my Mother, my brothers, my Parents, my friends, the esteem . . . of the rest of my world, the advantages that come with me and my House, and maybe even more.

Not long after this, the office of the *avogadori di comun* discovered that in the early seventeen-thirties, before Sir Richard Wynne arrived in Venice, the young Anna Gazzini had become pregnant after being "deflowered by a Greek," and had left the child in an orphanage. With this revelation, the negotiations came to a halt.

Mrs. Wynne began making preparations to move to London, where she hoped to establish herself and the children, with the help of their English relatives. But, before the family left, Giustiniana, perhaps in reaction to the devastation of her imagined future with Andrea, had what she called a "moment of weakness" with another man. (The letters to Andrea that we have don't specify who her lover was or when she met him.) Although Andrea forgave her, she continued to damn herself even after her family's departure from Venice. "I despise my life and I despise myself even more," she wrote to him from Vicenza, the first stop on their long journey to England, as she contemplated "the unhappy combination of events which has ruined me in your eyes."

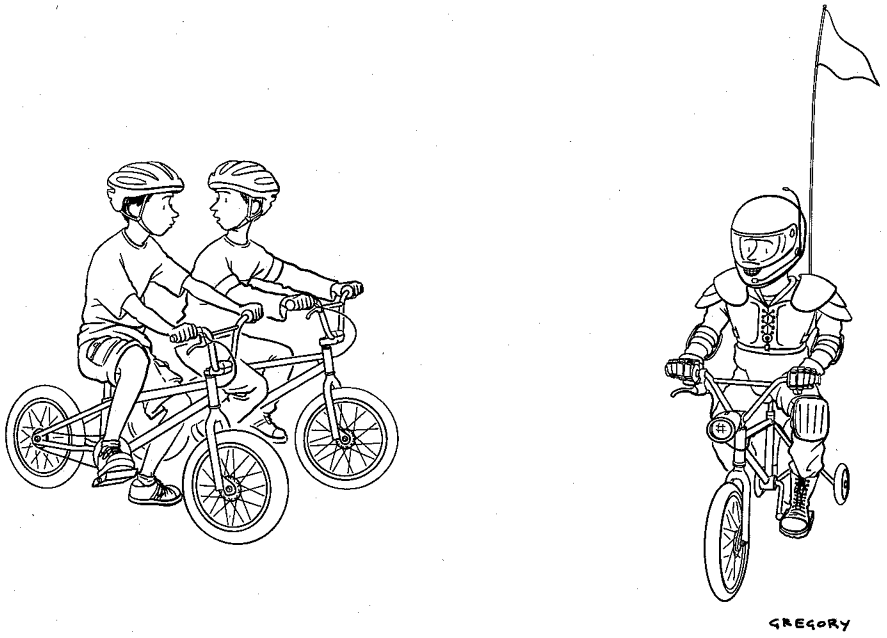
Nonetheless, Andrea and Giustiniana still talked about spending their lives together. They were determined to thwart Mrs. Wynne's plan to settle in London, and Andrea concluded that Giustiniana must marry a wealthy widower in Paris, where the Wynnes were to stay for some months en route. He selected Alexandre Jean Joseph Le Riche de la Pouplinière, one of the wealthiest of the *fermiers généraux*, the king's tax collectors. Giustiniana promised to apply herself to the task. "I will take a keen interest in La Pouplinière and my future state, which will depend entirely upon myself and my reputation," she wrote to Andrea while travelling to Paris. "With my good manners, my cleverness and my talent in eliciting the sympathy of others, I will make the catch. . . . Believe me, I will have a name and all the rest. . . . Trust me; I will tell you everything; I have given you my sacred word and I intend to keep it."

The fall of 1758 was an unsettling time in Paris. France, allied with Austria, Russia, and Saxony, was at war with Great Britain, Prussia, and the Hanoverian state. The fighting, which came to be known as the Seven Years' War, had been going on for two years, and France was faring badly. The Prussians had won numerous battles on the Continent, and the British were overtaking the French colonies in America and India. In August, several thousand British troops had landed in Normandy and inflicted serious damage before the French pushed them back to the sea. But in Paris there were lavish dinners every night, the theatres were full, and the public Opera Balls drew crowds of thousands.

The Wynnes settled into a residential hotel and obtained permission to stay through the winter, but, as they were English citizens, their position was tenuous. Giustiniana made a careful first foray into Parisian society, a Sunday drive in the gardens of the Tuileries with her sisters. "We went around only twice in our *déshabillé* and yet we were much looked at, and heard we were the most beautiful and best-looking women there," she wrote to Andrea. She found her rivals unimpressive: "Not a single beauty, many average-looking women and an infinite number of ugly ones." She was startled by the audacity of their décolleté. "All of them are naked," she wrote. "With nothing but a *petit collier* around their neck, and a *tour de gorge*"—a collar that was purely decorative.

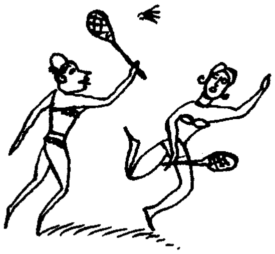
One night, shortly after the New Year, Giustiniana and her mother went to the Comédie Italienne, where they spotted Andrea's friend Giacomo Casanova, now a fugitive from the Venetian Republic and a celebrity in Paris. Casanova, already infamous for his appetites and his irreverence, had been jailed in Venice's prison of the Leads in July, 1755, on a combination of charges, including his openly proclaimed atheism and his dabbling in the occult. After fifteen months, Casanova had staged a spectacular escape and fled to Paris, where he became an agent for the French. He was dispatched to Dunkirk to assess the preparedness of the French Navy for a possible offensive against Great Britain, and then to Amsterdam to negotiate the sale of twenty million francs' worth of government bonds. He also helped launch a national lottery, and grew rich from a percentage of the ticket shares.

At the theatre, Giustiniana wrote to Andrea, Casanova made "a magnifi-



"Only child."

cent appearance." Mrs. Wynne, who had been wary of Casanova's flirtation with Giustiniana in Venice, now summoned him to their box. Casanova writes in his memoirs of his pleasure at seeing Giustiniana again: "She looks like a goddess. After a sleep of five years my love waked again with an increase in power equal to that which the object before my eyes had gained in the same period."



Soon he was a constant presence at the Wynnes' hotel. "He is with us every day, though his company does not please me," Giustiniana complained to Andrea. "He has a carriage, lackeys, and is attired resplendently. He has two beautiful diamond rings, two excellent watches, snuffboxes set in gold, and he is bedecked with lace. He has gained admittance, I do not know how, to the best Parisian society. He says he has a stake in a lottery in Paris and brags that this gives him a large income. . . . He is quite full of himself and far too showy. In a word, he is unbearable. Except when he speaks of his escape, which he recounts admirably." But, however she disparaged Casanova to Andrea, she tolerated his visits and even sought him out for private conversations, which Casanova, as he admits in his memoirs, always tried to turn into romantic encounters.

Casanova lived stylishly in a small community northwest of Paris, just beyond the city gates. He rented a house called Cracovie en Bel Air, with two gardens, stables, several baths, a good cellar, and an excellent cook. One day at the end of January, a messenger arrived at the house and handed him an envelope, which contained an extraordinary letter—unsigned, undated, rambling, and obviously written in great haste. It was in Giustiniana's handwriting. (The letter, which has never been published, recently turned up at auction in Paris and now belongs to a private collector.) It reads, in part:

> I am putting my life, my reputation, my whole being in your hands and through you I hope to find my salvation. I beg you to assist an unhappy soul who will have no other recourse but to seek her own death if she will not remedy her situation. Here it is, dear Casanova: I am pregnant and I shall kill myself if I am found out. It is now five months that my weakness and someone else's deception have caused me to hide in my breast the unhappy evidence of my ignorance and carelessness. No one knows about this, and the very author of my misery has been kept in the dark. I have managed to hide my secret so far but will not be able to deceive the world much longer. . . . My whole being, and everything I possess, will be yours if you help me. I will be so grateful. . . . Casanova dearest, please do your best to help me find a surgeon, a doctor who will lift me out of my misery by delivering me with whatever remedy and if necessary by force. . . . I do not fear pain, and as for payment, promise [the surgeon] anything you like. I will sell diamonds; he will be amply rewarded. I trust you: I have only you in the whole world. You will be my Redeemer. Ah Casanova, if only you knew how much I have wept! . . . Save me. I trust you.

Casanova records from memory a version of Giustiniana's letter, and he goes on to say that they arranged to meet at the next Opera Ball, in mid-February, at the height of Carnival. (Though dates, places, and names of people are sometimes inaccurate, Casanova scholars have long confirmed the general veracity of his accounts.) After midnight, he writes, the two slipped away, found a hackney cab, and drove across the Seine to the Left Bank, to meet a midwife, Reine Demay, in a rundown little apartment in the Rue des Cordeliers, near the Church of Saint-Sulpice. Demay was a louche, unkempt woman in her thirties. Casanova writes that she offered to prepare an abortion-inducing tonic for fifty louis—half the yearly rent that he paid for Cracovie en Bel Air. Abortion was a crime, punishable by death, and it suddenly occurred to Casanova that it had not been prudent to bring Giustiniana to this place. She was visibly upset, and he hurried her outside, suggesting that they go to Cracovie en Bel Air for a light supper before returning to the Opera Ball. Casanova, Giustiniana's "Redeemer," could not resist an opportunity. He fed her an omelette and opened a bottle of champagne. "So there we are, in front of the fire," he writes, "and now we have finished the bottle, and we rise, and half-pleadingly, half-using feeble force, I drop onto the bed, holding her in my arms; but she opposes my intention, first with honey-coated words, then by firm resistance, and finally by defending herself. That ends it. The mere idea of violence revolts me." He drove her back to the Opera Ball and soon lost her in the crowd.

Giustiniana reported none of this

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"We're not on vacation anymore. The company folded."

• •

to Andrea. Instead, her letters mark the progress of her seduction of La Pouplinière, the *fermier général.* Throughout January and February, she wrote boastfully of the attentions he lavished on her and, then, in late February, of his proposal. He had presented her with an engagement ring—two hearts elegantly entwined—and the promise of a generous income. "I think he has in mind something on the order of forty thousand francs," she told Andrea. "That would be ten thousand silver ducats a year. What do you say?" (It was nearly twice as large as the income of the entire Memmo clan.) La Pouplinière's extended family—including two former mistresses—were not happy about the idea of a new heir. Realizing that they might try to sabotage the match, he instructed a lawyer to speed up Giustiniana's naturalization papers and pressed the Wynnes to send immediately to the Venice archdiocese for an official document signed by the archbishop stating that Giustiniana had no other ties and was free to marry. A wedding was scheduled for mid-April.

Several days after the proposal, Louis de Castelbajac, an impoverished marquis and a well-known crook, appeared on La Pouplinière's doorstep claiming to have very damaging information about the young Englishwoman who frequented his house. Castelbajac, described in Casanova's memoirs as "thin, tall, dark, and marked with smallpox," had learned about Casanova and Giustiniana's visit to Reine Demay. He told La Pouplinière that Giustiniana was in an advanced state of pregnancy and that, two weeks earlier, Demay had been asked to perform an abortion on her. Later that day, Demay appeared at La Pouplinière's house and repeated Castelbajac's story.

A few days later, Castelbajac brought formal charges against Casanova, naming Demay as a witness, for trying to procure an abortion on behalf of Giustiniana. In her deposition, Demay did not identify Giustiniana but described "a young and pretty woman, magnificently dressed, wrapped in a pelisse of gray silk lined with sable; the skin of her face was very white, her hair and eyebrows dark brown; she was neither tall nor small . . . spoke French with difficulty." She noticed that the woman was "very thin" given that she was by then into her sixth month.

Whatever Castelbajac's objective was—a straightforward payoff from La Pouplinière's bitter relations, hush money from La Pouplinière, extortion money from Casanova, or perhaps all three—his scheme quickly backfired. La Pouplinière had Castelbajac followed and learned that he had indeed been plotting with the entourage of relatives and former mistresses. Casanova brought a counter-charge of calumny against the Marquis and the midwife, and the two were temporarily jailed. Despite this development, the case against Casanova slowly proceeded.

There had been rumors about Giustiniana's pregnancy for months. Several anonymous letters had surfaced, one of which accused Giustiniana of having already given birth to two children in Venice, and of being pregnant with a third. "Threats, anonymous letters, paid agents: nothing was spared to give [La Pouplinière] the sorriest impression of me," Giustiniana wrote to Andrea. "Thank God they have failed and all their plots were uncovered."

By the end of March, Giustiniana was nearing the eighth month of pregnancy, and it was surely becoming almost impossible to conceal her condition. Casanova's memoirs testify to her growing desperation: she did not balk when he told her he had learned of an alchemical formula whose basic ingredient was powdered saffron, usually mixed with a paste of honey and myrrh. He writes:

> The woman . . . was to put a dose of this opiate on the end of a cylinder of the proper

> size and insert it in her vagina in such a way as to stimulate the round piece of flesh at the top of her such and such. . . . This procedure [was to be] repeated three or four times a day for six or seven days. . . . On the spur of the moment it occurred to me to tell her that [it] had to be mixed with sperm which had not lost its natural heat for a single instant.

Casanova maintains that Giustiniana "was very intelligent [but] the candor of her soul prevented her from suspecting a fraud." They agreed to meet secretly in the garret of her hotel, shortly after eleven o'clock one night. Casanova supplied the "opiate"—just honey from his kitchen at Cracovie en Bel Air. He goes on:

> In our utter seriousness we appeared to be a surgeon getting ready to perform an operation and the patient who submits to it. Miss was the operating surgeon. She sets the open box at her right, then lies down on her back, and, spreading her thighs and raising her knees, arches her body; at the same time, by the light of the candle, which I am holding in my left hand, she puts a little crown of [the formula] on the head of the being who is to convey it to the orifice where the amalgamation is to be accomplished.

The potion did not work, of course, on that night or the few others on which they met in the garret. Faced with another failure, and fearing that she would be called to testify in the case against Casanova and be identified by Demay, Giustiniana finally turned to finding a suitable place to deliver the baby.

At last, Casanova came up with a solution. He arranged for her to stay at a Benedictine convent in the small village of Conflans, a few miles outside the city, and gave her two hundred louis to pay for transportation and expenses during her stay. Within a few days, everything was ready.

On April 3rd, Giustiniana met with the seamstresses about her wedding dress and discussed various ideas for her trousseau. Early the following morning, according to a letter she wrote Andrea several months later, she set out from her hotel wrapped in a cloak, the hood pulled over her head. She took a horse-drawn cab to a nearby church, paid the coachman, got into a second cab, and was driven to another church. From there she took a third cab and left the city from the eastern Porte Saint-Antoine.

Giustiniana wrote both to her mother and to La Pouplinière that she had been

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forced into hiding because of the constant threats from those who opposed the marriage. Under such circumstances, she could not possibly go ahead with the wedding, and she would not reveal her hiding place until the marriage was called off. To mislead the police, she said she was staying in Paris.

She hadn't yet sent word to Andrea, but inevitably he learned of her disappearance. "You would not believe, sir, the noise this affair has made here," one of Andrea's Parisian correspondents wrote. Several months after her escape, "she still remains the news of the day in a country that usually thrives only on novelty. . . . If poor Miss Wynne had wanted people to know she was in town, I can assure you she would have been very satisfied for I can't remember anyone being talked about so much." Meanwhile, Andrea sent Giustiniana anguished letters—intercepted by Mrs. Wynne—in which he expressed concern over her whereabouts and assured her that he believed in her innocence.

Andrea's attempts to get credible information from his friends in Paris were frustrated. "You must let me know once and for all precisely what has occurred," he wrote to Casanova. (Not surprisingly, he received an evasive response.) More disquieting was a short note that Niccolò Erizzo, the Venetian Ambassador in Paris, sent Andrea in reply to his anxious queries. Erizzo was a respected statesman, a member of the Venetian ruling class. Even though Andrea belonged to a younger generation, the Ambassador always addressed him as an equal. His words were harsh:

> Esteemed friend, I had the honor of receiving two letters in which you urge me to tell you what has happened to your beautiful Miss Wynne, who has not written to you for many days, and who, to your surprise, is beginning to be talked about in the most equivocal manner; and so you would like me to give you an accurate report on what has occurred. I very much wish I were in a position to oblige you; but the anecdotes are numerous and of such a nature that I would be compelled to write for two hours—and this after I have just finished writing a long dispatch. Suffice to say that her conduct was ridiculous and imprudent in the extreme, and if she had sought advice from sensible people everything would have been settled. I believe it is entirely superfluous to say more since it would appear, if what I have been told is correct, that you are in a better position to inform me than I am to inform you. It is believed, among other things, that she has rushed to Venice or wherever you might have told her to go. Please forgive me.

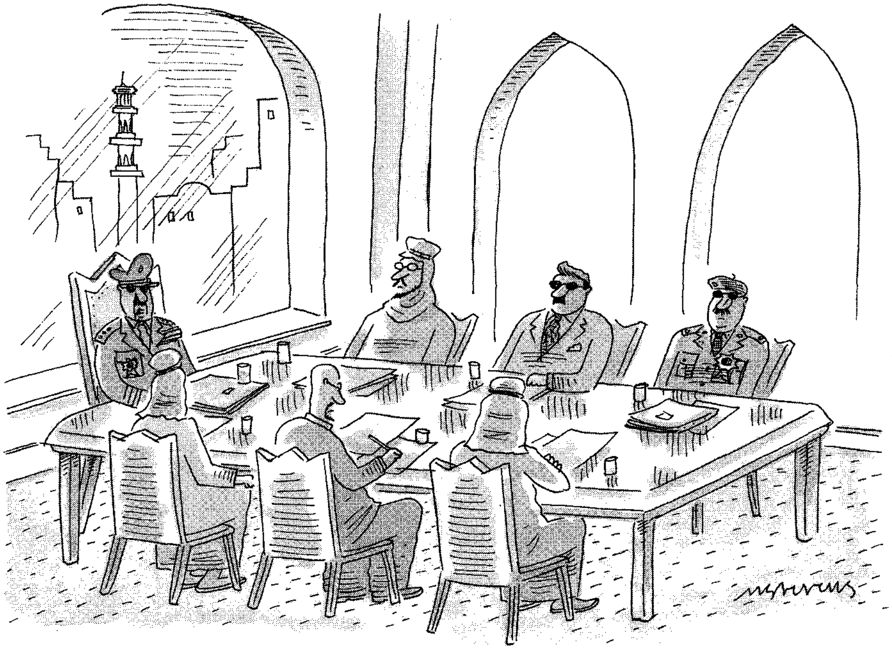
At the end of May, according to Casanova's account, Giustiniana gave birth. The child's fate remains a mystery, and even its name is unknown. Giustiniana left the convent sometime between the end of June and the beginning of July, and wrote to Andrea for the first time in three months. She begged him to forgive her for her silence, blamed her "enemies' craftiness," and thanked him for having faith in her. Because of the commotion caused by *l'affaire* Wynne, as it had come to be known, the government informed the Wynnes that their papers, which were expiring, would not be renewed. It was time to continue the journey to England.

When it became clear that Giustiniana would be leaving town, the pressure to testify against Casanova ceased, and her name was officially cleared. (His name was eventually cleared, too, and there is no evidence that a trial took place.) "The statement that establishes my innocence is all I really wanted," Giustiniana noted with relief. Before their departure, she wrote to Andrea, with a certain amount of disingenuousness:

> Mon cher frère, We leave next week for Bruxelles having been dismissed by the Minister, probably thanks to the work of the old man's relatives, who will have had no trouble in convincing the authorities it was wrong for such a fortune to end up in the hands of an Englishwoman—especially in these times. As an excuse, we were told our papers were expired and winter had been over for a long time. . . . I cannot tell you how disgusted I am with this country and with [La Pouplinière's] household. . . . Oh why are you not here to advise me? Dear Memmo, how many woes I have suffered, how many scares, how many slanders! My story is so unlike me. Never mind; you will know all; you have always been my best friend and always will be. I still love you, Memmo. You know that.

The Wynnes left Paris in mid-July. They spent a year in London, and then, in the fall of 1760, when Giustiniana was twenty-three, moved back to Italy. They stayed briefly in Padua while Mrs. Wynne looked for a house in Venice. By this time, Andrea, who was thirty-one, had taken an "official lover"—a married woman who, in keeping with local custom, provided stability and respectable company while he focussed on his political career. Giustiniana kept her distance, and the letters from Padua are full of misunderstandings, caused in part by Andrea's ambivalence about her return. At the end of November, Giustiniana arranged to see Andrea for the first time in more than two years. "It seems I am happy today, or at least not as sad as I usually feel," she wrote. She went on:

> I am much obliged for your sweet words in your last letter. But Memmo, you know we must not believe in them. And poor us if we should listen to our hearts. I do not know what mine tells me about you; but even if it spoke out it would gain nothing for I have sworn to be deaf. For pity's sake, let us remain friends. So I



"If we don't comply, they're threatening us with liberation."

> shall see you at Mira? I feel pleasure in imagining this reunion. I don't drive the idea away from me. Enough now. . . . Farewell, Memmo.

Though they did remain friends, this is the last known fragment of their correspondence.

A year later, in 1761, Giustiniana married an aging widower, Philip Joseph, Count Orsini-Rosenberg, the Austrian Ambassador to Venice. It was the kind of match that both Andrea and her mother had always wanted for her. In 1764, Count Rosenberg was recalled to Austria, where he died the following year. (He and Giustiniana had no children.) She stayed in Austria for five more years before returning to Italy.

Andrea married Elisabetta Piovene, a pretty girl from a good family in Vicenza, in 1769. They had two daughters, Lucietta and Paolina, whom Andrea adored. His marriage was not particularly happy, but his career flourished. In 1775, after a decade-long political apprenticeship, he was rewarded with the governorship of Padua. He ran the city for two years, devoting a great deal of energy to an ambitious and somewhat extravagant architectural project—the creation of a vast oval plaza on the southern rim of the city center, known as Prato della Valle. His stewardship of one of the largest cities in the Venetian state was deemed a success. In 1777, he was appointed Ambassador to Constantinople.

Giustiniana had meanwhile cultivated new friends and interests. Her connections abroad and her knowledge of languages made her the ideal chaperon for foreign travellers. The writer William Beckford, who became a close friend, describes how happy he was to recommend the "fascinating" Giustiniana to English friends on holiday in Italy. When Grand Duke Paul Petrovich of Russia and his wife, Maria Fyodorovna, made a private visit to Venice in 1782, Giustiniana wrote a vivid account:

> Everywhere the word was spreading. "We are about to see the son of Catherine the Great!" The fire of the Italian imagination is well known: that of the Venetians is not mitigated by the fact that they live on the water. On the contrary, it seems this local peculiarity gives their feelings a special intensity. Everyone wanted to help in order to welcome the Princes in the most honorable way possible. The fact that they wished to travel incognito, however, made it difficult to give them a treatment at once discreet and passionate. The Venetians, true to their reputation as skilled politicians, managed to reconcile very adroitly the Princes' request to remain incognito with the magnificence of the festivities they organized in their honor . . . by resorting to the use of decorative masks.

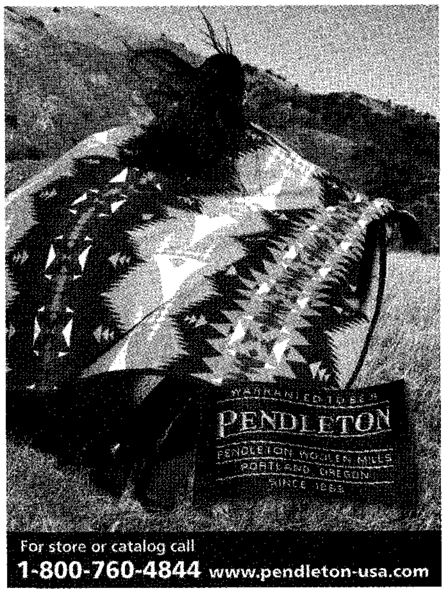
She wrote in French, in the form of a long letter to one of her brothers, and the piece was published as a short book, "Du Séjour des Comtes du Nord à Venise." It was quite well received in literary circles. Giustiniana's old friend Casanova, who was back in Venice working as a government informer and living in reduced circumstances, wrote her a letter praising her "easy and unpretentious style." She replied with a formal thank-you note.

By this time, Giustiniana had established a pleasant and productive routine for herself. She spent the winter in Padua, making frequent forays into Venice. In the summer, she moved to Alticchiero, a delightful villa on the southern bank of the Brenta, just a few miles from Padua, which belonged to her friend Angelo Querini, a senator from Venice. She continued to write, publishing a collection of essays in 1785, a guide to Querini's villa in 1787, and, in 1788, a romantic novel set in the rugged mountains of Dalmatia.

In 1787, when Andrea's daughter Lucietta married Alvise Mocenigo, Giustiniana attended. As was the custom, a stream of celebratory poems and miscellanies were printed for the wedding. Giustiniana contributed a slim volume of allegorical prose, beautifully bound and illustrated, which seemed intended less for the new couple than for her own first great love. The dedication reads:

> Thee I invoke, nurturing Venus, as partner in writing these words I essay to fashion for my good Memmo, whom thou, goddess, hast willed at all times to excel, endowed with all gifts.

Giustiniana died, most likely of uterine cancer, on August 22, 1791, in a house she had rented in Padua for the summer. She was fifty-four years old. Near the end of her life, as she lay ill, Andrea went to visit her. According to Lucietta, he was "distraught" at the sight of Giustiniana's ravaged body and the pain she was suffering. Recalling their long and tormented love affair, he described her as "the one to whom I was entirely dedicated," and praised "her original mind" and those "rare qualities that made her soul sublime." ♦



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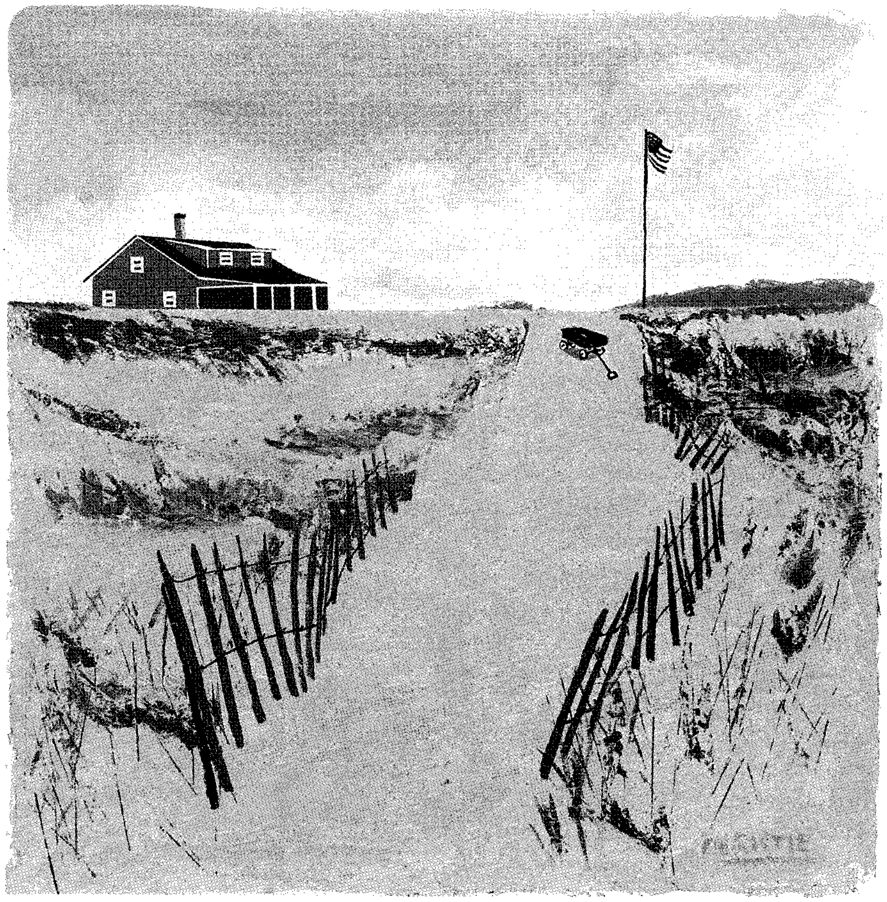
PERSONAL HISTORY

AN ENLARGED HEART

Near the ocean, a child falls ill.

BY CYNTHIA ZARIN



It was August, and we were at the beach. All winter we dreamed of the house.

It began with a cough. Her brother had a cough. And, after all, what was a cough? They had all had them. In winter, they passed them around like sweets. Enough coughing meant no school. Although sometimes we sent them off anyway—risking a call from the school nurse, who only half the time would be convinced by our pleading that it was nothing—so that a few more hours might elapse before the apartment filled with their books and the paper wrappers from their snacks.

But now it was August, and we were at the beach. All winter we dreamed of the house, with its blue floors, the tiny periscope hole in the roof, the red chairs, the rickety porch with its view of the bay. The children turned brown. It was hot. The sea was flat. At low tide, a little pool appeared, and a sandbar, and she, the youngest at three, stood on tiptoe in the water, screeching when an inch-high wave hit. "I think the water's actually cold," she ran to tell us. "No, I think it's actually warm." We sat by the edge in our low beach chairs, the same chairs that used to embarrass us when our parents brought them to the beach. Why do we have so much stuff? we would ask them, eager to be free of it all, of the towels and swimsuits and bottles of juice and fruit, imagining ourselves alone on an empty stretch of beach, naked, with a rucksack. Now we're the ones who unload the car and carry the heaviest bags.

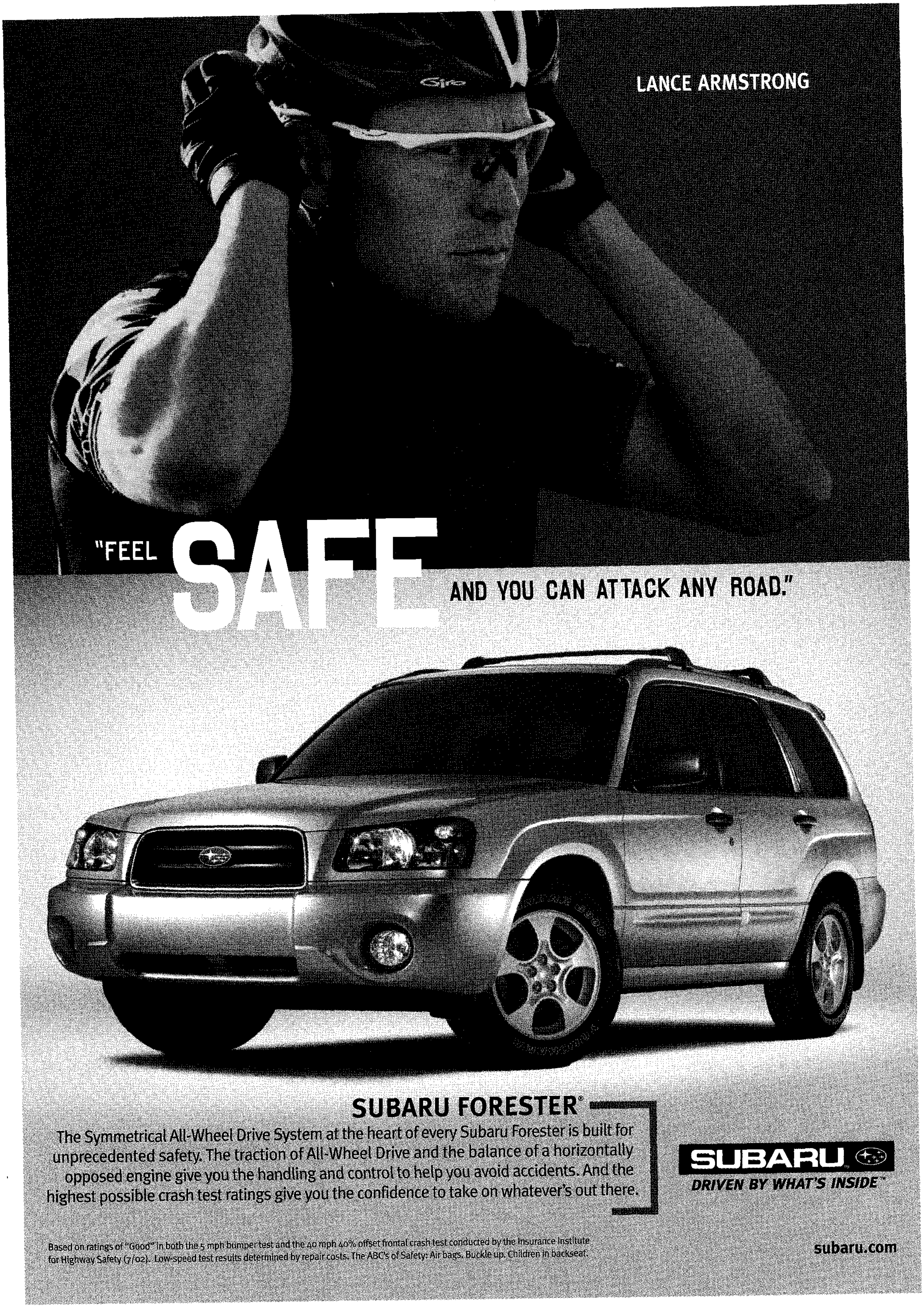
She's so little we let her run naked, even though we have learned that turning brown is bad. We are careless, self-indulgent, to let her do it. By late afternoon, the sun has slipped behind the enormous high dunes, and blue shadows lap at the water. When she comes up from the edge, she is shivering. Her older sisters and brother and their friends are far out in the waves, on their boogie boards and surfboards, unidentifiable in their black wetsuits. We keep track by counting. One, two, three, four, five, six. Is that Anna? We ask each other. Do you see Nick? There's Rose. "Come in now! Come in!" we scream at them, our arms making huge pinwheels so they will pay attention. It is easy for them to pretend they don't see us.

During the night, she coughs on and off, and wakes once. The wind on the bluff pounds the house. In the morning, it is hot and blue again. We get to the beach after lunch, but the sun is still high. From the top of the dune, shielding our eyes, we look for the cluster of bright umbrellas that mark the colony of our friends. They hail us. The older children jump like seals into the waves and swim out to their pals. She stays by the edge. Today, there is another child her age, but she's cranky and won't play. It's too much sun, she didn't sleep, we explain to the other child's parents, chagrined. Secretly, we're annoyed: why won't she just play nicely? The younger children are fooling around with the surfboard, and she wants to try. A wave rears up suddenly, a dragon, foaming at the mouth, she's hurled underwater and onto the sand. Everyone races to help. How can we have allowed this to happen? This is appalling! She is young, much too young for these high jinks. She comes up sputtering. What kind of parents are we? Until someone else makes a mistake, our reputation is shaken.

That night, she wakes up every hour coughing. The cough catches her throat, grips it, then lets go. We give her some children's medicine to make her sleep. At some point, I lie down beside her in her bed, and when I wake up it is morning.

The day is blustery and cool. On and off, we feel her forehead. Tonight is a friend's birthday, and we will be nine people for dinner. The middle children go next door to babysit for

R. GREGORY CHRISTIE



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the younger ones. She sleeps upstairs through the noise. When everyone has left, she wakes up, coughing. When I put my arms around her, she begins to vomit. Get a bucket, I say to the nearest child. They know the drill. We've been through this countless times, with one or the other of them. We have been awakened by children standing by the side of the bed with bloodied noses, by a decade of earaches. But now—and we don't know why—we are frightened. She vomits again and again into the bucket, taking rasping breaths. Her forehead is warm but not hot. Her arms flail, and she isn't focussing.

We do not have a telephone. The cell phone works only if you walk a quarter mile down Corn Hill to the public-beach parking lot. There are no all-night drugstores. This is why we come here. We like it. We are against the plans for the new Stop & Shop in this small Cape Cod village.

Get Anne, I say. One of the children, white-faced, returns from next door with Anne, who left the table only twenty minutes ago. While we are nonchalant about our children, Anne's father was a doctor in rural South Africa, and knowing more—knowing what can happen—she is careful. When she peers into the bed, she agrees right away that something is wrong: the child looks odd. Her breathing is coming in shudders. Someone remembers that Giulia's grandmother, down the way, has a telephone. No doctor at the Health Services, in Provincetown, is on call for summer residents; we must call the Rescue Squad. We worry that we are being ridiculous, but we call. "What's the worst thing that could happen?" Anne asks. "That you don't need them?" Her father goes out into the dark to wait for the Rescue Squad.

The van comes in five minutes, red lights flashing. Her temperature is 100.1; her vital signs are normal. If we are worried, we can take her to the hospital in Hyannis, an hour away.

We decide to wait until morning. In the kitchen, she sits on my lap in one of the red chairs. Because we have run out of medicine and not replaced it during the day—another sign of our foolhardiness, our nonchalance—even though it is too late, we call our friends up the road, Luke and Emily, the parents of our children's friends, and they arrive by car in what seems like an instant, bottle in hand. I take off my vomit-covered sweater. She throws up, just a little, on my shirt. But she is smiling, at Emily, who is looking at her with great tenderness, saying, Poor baby.

The next morning, while the other children sleep, we take her in the station wagon to the health clinic in Provincetown. The waiting room, streaming with light, is almost empty. Two emaciated men sit next to each other on the wall facing the parking lot. There are no appointments until later in the day, but the nurse, after looking at me, comes out to the parking lot to have a look at her. Immediately, there is an appointment. The nurses are beautiful and tall. This is Provincetown, and I wonder briefly if they are transvestites. The doctor's lovely mild face is perplexed. It looks like a virus. Her fever is 101.2. We are to alternate Tylenol and Motrin every three hours. Her skin is dry to the touch.

At home, she is hungry and wants lunch. She eats ramen noodles, and throws up. The older children wake up, eat breakfast, and are taken to the beach with the surfboards and boogie boards, their horrible pink juice, their box of Goldfish. Her fever disappears.

She wants to play Wiffle ball on the strip of sand on top of our dune. After playing for ten minutes, she goes inside and sleeps with her blanket on the couch. That night, she vomits twice. In the morning, she gets into our bed and, turning her head, vomits directly into my hair. She is hot again. On her back there are a few scattered red marks, as if a bird had walked along the short length of her spine. We call her doctor in New York. He is away, taking his child to college. We speak to another doctor, his partner. He says, Take her back to Provincetown.

Now at the clinic we are treated as old friends. "Hello, hello," they say.

One of the tall and beautiful nurses takes her blood pressure. The doctor arrives. Her temperature is 102.4. When she coughs, she takes a moment to catch her breath. Her breathing is shallow, and she is whimpering. The doctor decides to take a blood count: maybe there is an infection we can't see?

The blood test shows nothing. Her

white-blood-cell count is normal. The doctor examines her again. The rash on her back has spread to her stomach: small red dots just under her skin, from sternum to groin. But by now she has an infection in her left ear. This is good: there is something to do. New York is called, and agrees with the doctor's recommendation: a massive shot of antibiotics, called Ceftriaxone. It may also attack any bacterial infection that may be lurking. That day's notes say, "Case assumed by Dr. Lazarus in New York," followed by the phone number of the pediatrician's West End Avenue office. The antibiotics will be injected into the muscle of her thigh. Her father leaves the room. Hold her legs down, I'm told. I hold her small legs. Are her eyes red? It's hard to tell. She is crying. When we leave the clinic, we are both given get-well stickers. One for Mommy, the nurse says.

In the car back to Truro, past the long sweep of dunes where the Pilgrims first found fresh water, I think: Scarlet fever. Malaria. Diphtheria. Smallpox. Scurvy. Leeches. Flu? My aunt and my father had polio when they were children. My grandparents closed up their house in Brooklyn and moved to a hotel near the hospital. When we get home, she lies on the couch with her blanket. It's a rainy day, and the hill is full of children. Anna, Lev, and Joseph take turns reading to her. The Wolf eats Grandma; the Troll bellows from under the bridge. She smiles, on and off, eats a few Goldfish crackers. Her four-year-old friend Adam goes in and out of the house cheerily, checking in. I count up in my head. Taking our children together, we have thirty-eight years of child-rearing experience. If you include our friends who drop by and stand over the couch like figures in a nineteenth-century print, "The Invalid," the number lurches up to a hundred and thirty-three. The consensus is: something's wrong with this child. And our friends are not keeping their own children away: the unspoken feeling is that, whatever this is, it isn't contagious. Later I will think, How did we know?

For supper, we have corn from the farm stand, cherrystones and grilled tuna for the grownups, and hamburgers for the children. She eats nothing. Asleep in our bed at the back of the house, she wakes every half hour and throws up. She asks for water, but it comes right back up. In the morning, she begins vomiting long streaks of bright-green bile. When I change her soiled pajamas, which should be soaked because her skin is hot but are not, the rash has melted together into an angry range of welts across her trunk and back.

It is raining again. In the parking lot down the hill, I am on the cell phone to New York. For the first time, I lose my temper when talking to a doctor's office. Told "The doctor will call you back," I begin to scream into the phone that, no, he will not call me back, you will get him, now. I know this is a bad idea. After a long time, the receptionist comes back to the phone. All the doctors are with patients. By now, I am crying. I tell her that we have been patients in this practice for a decade, that I've never made such a phone call before, that I know exactly what is going on in the office—there are two kids with ear infections and five kids waiting for school checkups—and she is to get someone right now. Dr. Lazarus comes to the phone.

We return to Provincetown. It sounds to New York that she's lost so much fluid she may need to be hydrated. How will Provincetown know? They'll look at her, they'll know. When we get there, they call an ambulance.

Inside the ambulance, it's our old friends from the Rescue Squad. Should we have taken her to the hospital on Tuesday? They check her vital signs. This includes pressing her finger until the flesh under the nail turns white, and counting how long it takes for it to flush pink again. It takes too long. She's not getting enough oxygen. Or maybe just enough. Just enough isn't O.K. I'm given a choice: either she can hold—or I can hold—a green bear that will breathe pure oxygen into her face or an oxygen mask will be put on over her face. I choose the green bear.

I'm crouched next to the car seat, on the floor of the ambulance. The green

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bear starts to work. The technician has a last name—Silva—that's common in Provincetown. Is she a local girl? "You bet I am," she says. "When I was in high school, I couldn't date—everyone was my cousin." She has two kids. Last weekend, the two town ambulances made fourteen trips, a record. Looking down at my own child on the stretcher, I notice two things: the whites of her eyes are bright red, and the fingers on both hands look scorched, as if somewhere along the way she's burned herself.

In the emergency room, the technicians slide her onto a bed. Goodbye, goodbye. I am alone. Her father has followed the ambulance in the station wagon. When he explained in Provincetown that he wanted to do this, it became immediately clear that he meant that literally: behind the ambulance, at ambulance speed. He was dissuaded. So he has driven, at a moderately reasonable pace, on the highway, but he's not here yet. A covey of nurses has gathered around her, and they insert an I.V. into her left hand. She is screaming. Then the E.R. doctor comes in. He is a man my own age called Nate Rudman—a familiar name. Do I know him? I knew a Seth Rudman in high school, I know a poet called Mark Rudman. Nate comes up blank. No. She is calming down on the bed. By now I am quite sure I know what is wrong: the little boy next door in New York had been exposed to Coxsackie disease, a minor, irritating childhood malady. Before we left, it was going around the neighborhood. I am very busy being sure. I am relieved: the proof is her inflamed hands. I inform the doctor, Nate Rudman, that she has Coxsackie disease, but he pays no attention to me.

He is gone from the room. The nurses flutter like pigeons. He returns. I tell him again about the boy next door with Coxsackie. No, he says. She does not have Coxsackie. His exact words are: She doesn't have Coxsackie disease. She has Kawasaki disease. It will take two weeks before I can say this properly. Excuse me? This disease, he says, is the primary cause of acquired, potentially fatal, coronary aneurysms in young children.

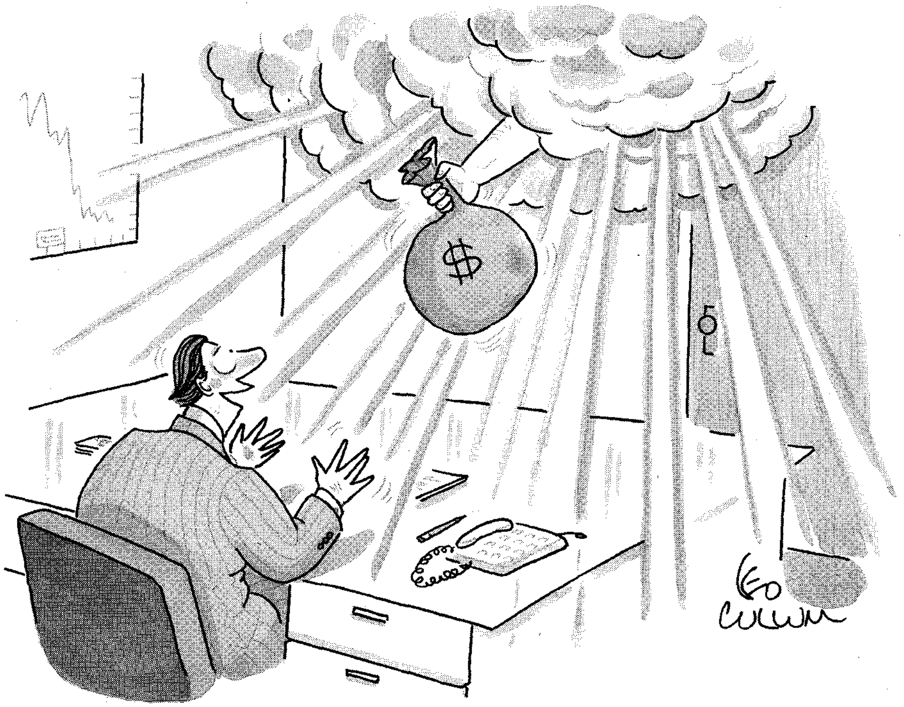
The blue room turns green. I am standing by the side of the bed. The bed has a bar. I hold on to it. A chair materializes. I sit down on it. Once, when I was a girl, I dove down from a high bank covered with damp moss into a deep lake and my mind went blank in the black cold water. I surface now into the brightly lit room. Before she was born, before we decided to have a child together—she is the first child of our marriage, and the only one—I thought of this. I thought, We are too happy, we are asking the evil eye to come among us. Kenaharah, my grandmother would say, if we were too much praised. Don't shine too much light or the Devil will see. The Devil is like a moth—he is attracted to light. When the children are admired, I instinctively deflect it. Pretty is as pretty does, I say. Stop reading twigs in the forest, you idiot Russian, my oldest friend laughs at me. But now it has come to pass.

The doctor, my new friend, my enemy, the bringer of bad news, says, You need to go to Boston, immediately. He has called Children's Hospital in Boston; we can wait if we like for a confirmation of the diagnosis, but he is sure. Can you stick out your tongue for me, baby, he says to her, tiny in the bed. Her tongue is the bright-red color of blood. See, he says to me. See?

I lie down next to her. A nurse puts the bar up behind me, so I don't fall out. Now we are both patients. The doctor is speaking to me, and I listen carefully, because I know this is a test. It is the first of a score of explanations we will be given over the next days and weeks, but I don't know that yet. As I listen, I think, This is what growing old is. We think we will learn Sanskrit, learn Greek. Instead, what we learn is more than we ever wanted to know about things we wish we'd never heard of. I think only, You cannot fall apart.

"Kawasaki disease," Dr. Rudman, a total stranger, says, "was discovered by a Japanese doctor. No one knows what causes it; it may be an autoimmune disease that reacts to staphylococcus bacteria. If it is not treated early, within the first ten days, twenty per cent of patients, primarily children between the ages of six months and five years old, will suffer heart damage. The aneurysm can be fatal. It can be easy to miss, because the symptoms often do not present themselves at once: the red eyes, the swollen hands, the fever, the rash. The symptoms can come and go."

I lie on the bed holding her hand and think, How dare he talk to me like this? Later, I will realize that he had no choice, that he had to tell me right away so that I would not argue with him, so



"Oh, thank you, Lord! Do I have to tell my partner?"

that I would pay attention, but now I am angry. He tells me what we are going to do: Children's Hospital in Boston is the best place in the world to go; that is where we are going. Arrangements have been made. The treatment is a massive dose of intravenous immunoglobulin. She has had a fever for five days. It is the earliest that Kawasaki disease can be diagnosed. Already, the rash on her hands is fading: once it had disappeared, diagnosis would have been more difficult. In a moment, we have gone from being ravaged to being lucky. I realize it is Nate Rudman who has caught it early.

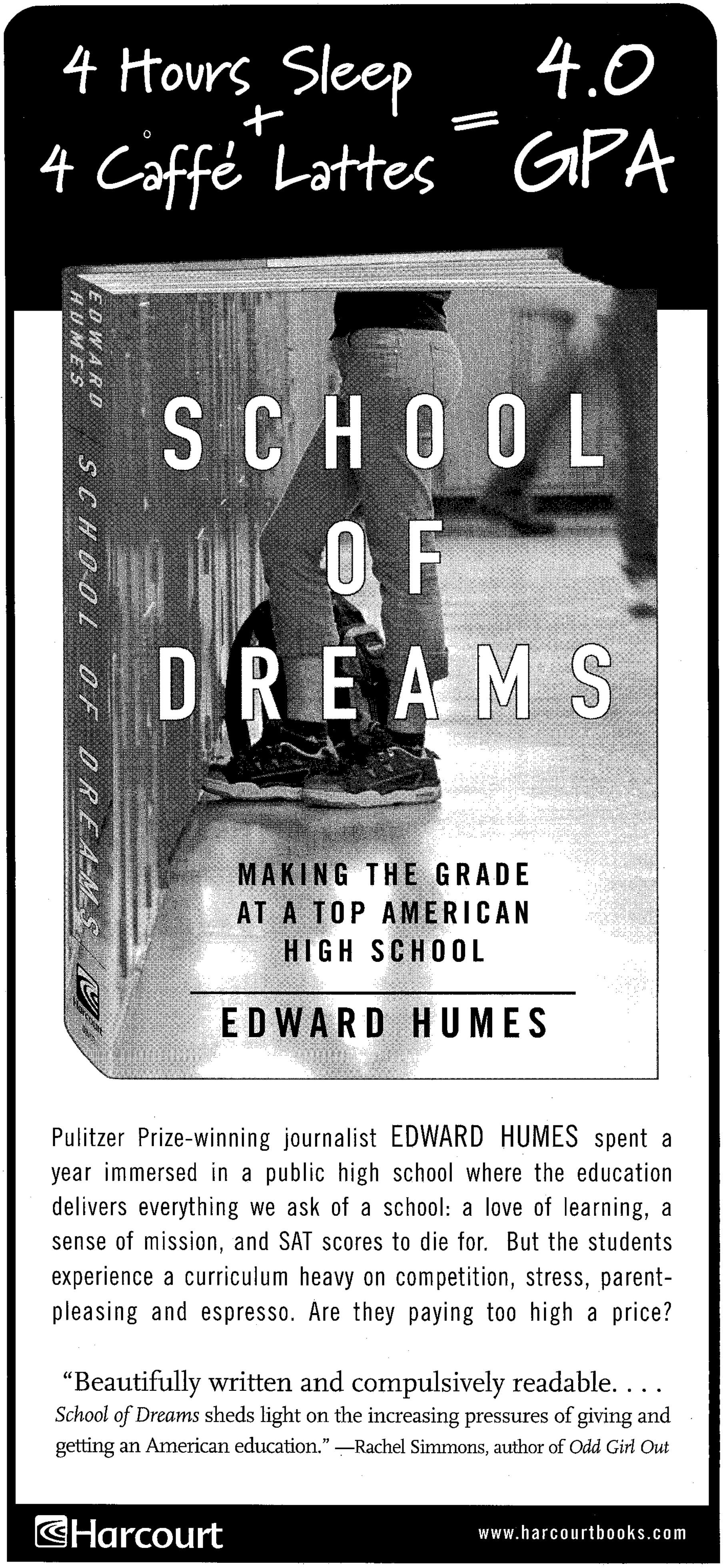
Her father arrives. When she sees him, she throws up. I wipe her face. It's the first time he has seen her on an I.V. I am an old hand now, having been here for half an hour. There are four nurses in the room. I ask them if it would be possible for them to leave us alone for a minute. I ask him to sit down, and then I tell him.

We sit in the room together for a little while, and then he goes out to make phone calls. Our other children are scattered about; we must have someone collect them. Their grandparents live nearby. They go to our house on the hill and wait for our children to be dropped off by friends. Where are their surfboards, where are their wetsuits?

While he makes calls, I lie on the bed. She is hot but not sweating. I tell her we are going to Boston in another ambulance. Wait until you tell your brother Jack you rode in an ambulance! I say. I tell her the doctors are going to help her get better. They're hurting me, she says. When the nurse looms over us to fix the I.V., I tell her about our house, how I am a terrible housekeeper, how I am careless when I cook. I am maniacal. I tell her that I never clean properly, that I feed the children chocolate mousse made with raw eggs. She says it is not my fault, ten thousand children could be exposed to some weird thing, and only one will react with Kawasaki. Anyway, no one knows what causes it.

Of course it is my fault.

It will take an hour and fifteen minutes to get to Boston by ambulance. Behind us, cars clot the side of the road. This time the technician is young, overweight, and sweating in his uniform. He is twenty-four years old. I am told to strap myself in on the bench next to



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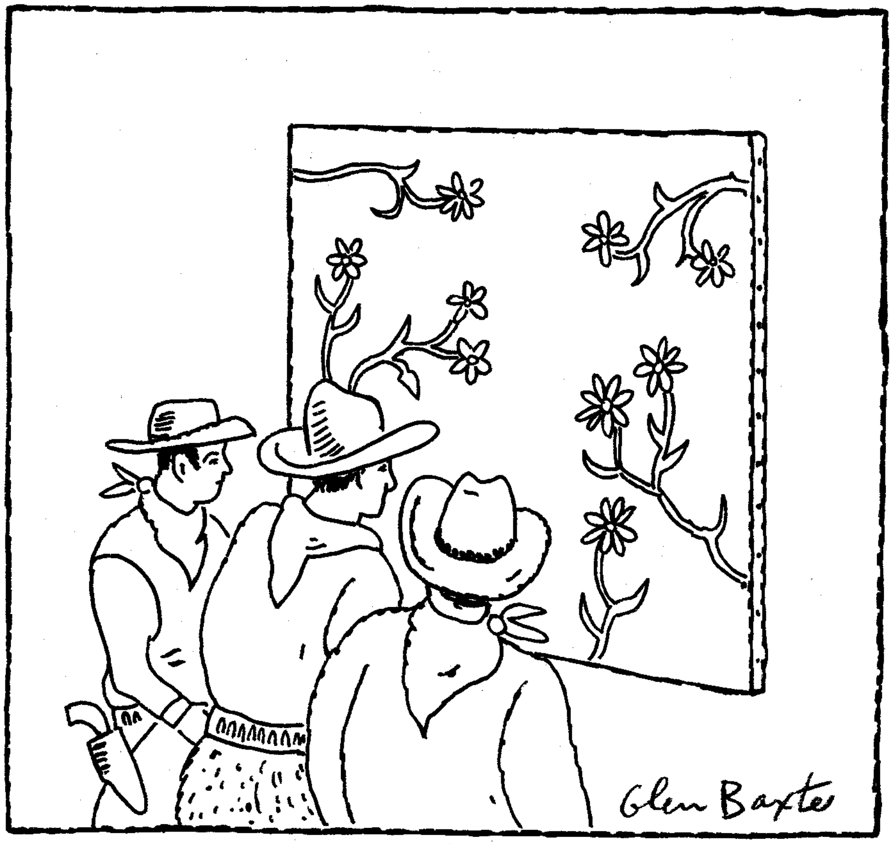


THE CRITICS SPOTTED THE BOGUS ROTHKO ALMOST IMMEDIATELY.

the stretcher. Instead, I crouch on the floor, beside her head. She does not let go of my hand. I remind her how when we drove up to the Cape a few weeks ago our car started to rattle, and we took it to a garage. Remember how it went up in the air, and the little man came to fix it? It was the gasket, she says, nodding solemnly. Her huge blue eyes stand out like anemones against the reddened whites. And then he fixed it and we went to Corn Hill? That's what this is like, I tell her. In the next days, we will talk about the car, and the little man, again and again. And it cost thirty-five dollars! she says with a whisper of glee.

Her hand is hot, her fingers like burning twigs. I hold on to it. I think, If this child dies, I will go mad. I think of a woman who wishes me ill, and I think, If something happens to this child, I will kill her. The technician asks me if I am all right, because I am crying. "If you act upset, you know, it can upset her," he says.

I give him a look of pure malevolence. He is right. He says, "I know how you feel."

Do you have children? I ask him.

"No, not yet."

I tell him he is wrong.

He has a girlfriend. She works in Sandwich. He was in a car accident last year and she came every Sunday to see him. The problem is she's always tired.

Drop her, I think. She's twenty-three and she's tired?

It's dark in Boston. In the busy emergency room, the walls are yellow. The nurse is called Mike. The television set is on in the little room. She takes three bites of a turkey sandwich, and immediately vomits. Sheets are brought. I change them myself. Once, then twice. So what's going on here? Mike asks. For the fourth time in as many hours, I recite our recent history: the fever, the rash. He nods. He pulls up her hospital gown to look at the rash, which completely covers her trunk. The rash has colonized the scrapes on her knee and on her elbow. (She fell, I think, defensively. She's three, it happens!)

We are waiting for "the Kawasaki team," doctors who are pediatric rheumatologists. No decisions can be made until the Kawasaki team arrives. We are lucky to be here, lucky, lucky, where there is a Kawasaki team. I call Dr. Lazarus in New York. They'll know, he says, they'll know. Her father comes in. He is too big to lie on the bed, so he pulls up a chair next to it. I go out to call the children. I ask each one what they would like to be doing if we were home. Rose wants to go back to Corn Hill to see her Italian friend, Giulia, who is leaving on Sunday. Jack wants to go to the flea market, Anna wants to go to the movies, to see "Blue Crush." The phone is passed around, these things will be accomplished. Anna, the eldest, gets back on the phone. She's talked to my sister, who is a pediatrician, who has told her the truth. She'll be O.K., won't she? Of course she'll be O.K., I say.

At eleven-thirty, four hours after we arrived in the emergency room in Boston, the Kawasaki team arrives. They are friendly and handsome, a matched pair. There is no doubt, they say after examining her, that she has Kawasaki disease, but every indication is that she will be fine. I gather myself up from the bed. You can't tell me that with absolute certainty, can you? I ask. No, they say.

Her father and I are in new territory. I need to go to the very end, to the worst possible outcome, and see where I am. He thinks this is a waste of time.

We are moved upstairs, to a room on the eighth floor. It's an all-purpose floor. Some children breathe on their own, some don't. In the room, we try to sleep but she keeps waking up. She is covered with wires. It hurts when they pull. She was a colicky baby and for three months stopped crying only when I held her. I held her. When can we go home? she asks. I am ashamed of myself even as I think it that I am angry we are missing our time at the beach. It is Friday. We can leave once she has had no fever for twenty-four hours. Before she leaves, she'll have an echocardiogram, to establish the extent of the damage. The nurse comes in every hour. Right now her temperature is 103.5.

Kawasaki disease is about time and space: it's about measurement. If the coronary arteries expand too far—the difference is in millimetres—the damage is irreversible. There are only thirty-five hundred cases a year in the United States, but it is suspected that more are undiagnosed. It's apparently not contagious. Occasionally, there are geographic clusters, three or four children from the same area, but there's no real evidence. The dose of immunoglobulin retards the expansion of the arteries, and it matters how quickly the child receives the dose. The product has to be mixed. The components are frozen, and they have to be defrosted. Her dose is ordered by the Kawasaki team at midnight, but it doesn't appear on the eighth floor until 5 A.M., because for two hours the order sat on someone's desk.

We are so exhausted that, even as wretched as we are, we could probably manage to sleep, but at 3 A.M. the room is rocked with noise. It's a double room, and three feet away, beyond the curtain, someone heavy is hurling himself (herself?) against the walls of a crib. Bang, bang, bang. Then a high-pitched keening, with no words. Yelping. In the din, a woman's voice says, "Oh dear, you got up too early, didn't you, didn't you." She croons this. The banging and growling continue. Holding hands, we hide in the white bed. In this long night, we have plunged, hapless, into a fairy tale. A nurse comes in on the hour to check her vital signs. What is that noise? I ask the nurse. She shakes her head at me, censoriously. The roar continues. A nurse comes in, finally, with the immunoglobulin, which replaces the hydration I.V. pack. The countdown starts. Gray light creeps into the room. At eight, a head peeks around the curtain. It belongs to the night crooner: a pale, dumpy woman with short, dyed-red hair. She is wearing a Red Sox sweatshirt and navy-blue sweatpants. She could be forty, or sixty.

"Did she keep you up?" she asks. There is no word for her tone but consoling. "She's deaf and blind, you know, so she can't hear herself. I'm sorry if she kept you up."

She vanishes into the bathroom.

We look at each other. We have known from the beginning that things could be worse. Here is worse. Sunny, composed, the woman emerges from the bathroom. She says, "I'm going to brush her hair. She loves to have her hair brushed." We listen, and from the other side of the curtain comes the sound of crooning, and what we can just make out as laughter.

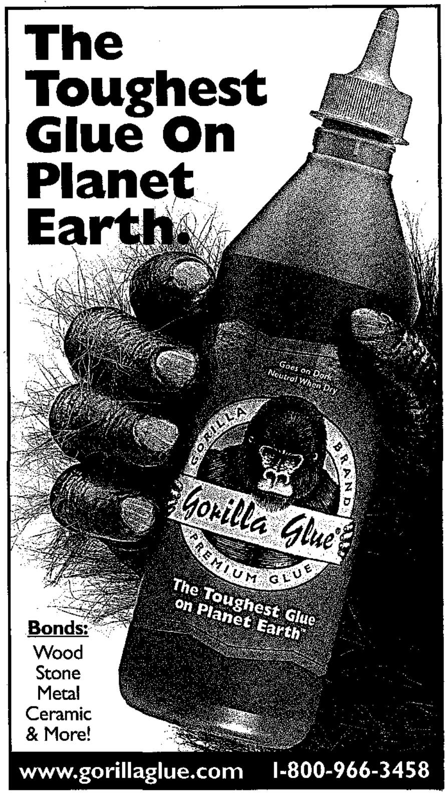
A few minutes later, she rounds the curtain again. She is pushing a wheelchair. In the chair is a little girl with gleaming hair. She is wearing a pinafore, pink socks, and white sneakers. Her arms hit out at nothing, and her legs are oddly flaccid. Her ears are too big for her face, and the lobes are pointed. How terrible, I am thinking, to bear such a child.

Her mother looks at her. "She's four. She's adopted," she says to us matter-of-factly. "When she was ten weeks old. Her parents couldn't take it—you know, the problems. They're wealthy, in California." She pauses, stroking her hair. "Sometimes he sends me money. I send him pictures, but I have to mail them to his office. The mother—she can't stand to look at them." She looks at us fiercely. "Their own flesh and blood."

Then she's benign again. "We live in New Hampshire, but we're here a lot. Cyclical vomiting. But I think we're going home today." She unbuckles her from the wheelchair and takes her by two hands, like a toddler.

"Look who's walking," cries a nurse in the reception area. There's a muffled sound of applause. Our own child, in bed but awake, looks after her. "That girl is like me," she says. We look at her aghast. She points to the I.V. in her hand. "She has a mitten, too."

A moment later, the same nurse—the nurse who would not speak to me in the early dawn—comes in again. She is all of twenty-five, twenty-eight. Boston Irish. She shakes her head. "There are three more of them at home. She takes care of them with her sister." She pauses, checking the monitor. "I think she's very religious." Later, we will tell our friend Storm, a priest,



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about the little girl, and we will accuse Storm of sending her to us. For now, we are stunned.

The days blur. Her father goes back to the Cape to take care of the other children, to round up their socks and flip-flops and towels from the houses of friends where they've left them. He drives back to the hospital the next day. We make telephone calls. No one's ever heard of this. Everyone goes on the Net: the phone rings with facts. Her grandmother flies up from New York, and takes up residence in a hotel across the street from the hospital. I become an old hand, I know where the jello is kept down the hall. I do not leave the hospital. The immunoglobulin drips into her arm.

Her temperature drops, and for a few hours she responds. The fog lifts, and in those minutes we can see her, we get our child back. She wants blue jello, she wants red. She wants ice cream. "I think my soup is actually warm," she says. "No, it's actually cold." But three hours after the I.V. drip stops, her fever almost immediately shoots back up again and she is gone. We have to do it again, says the Kawasaki team, which has become one person, a doctor from Nebraska in a violet sweater who has been in the hospital two days. In one or two per cent of the cases we see, she says, this happens. What she actually said, first, was: I don't want to tell you this.

Because I am an idiot—even now!—a person (still!) who would send her children to school with a cough, I point out that it's early evening, the witching hour: everyone's fever goes up at night. She's cranky and tired. I have four children, I know this. No, the doctor, whose name is Dr. Woodward, says. Her pale face is rigid with sleeplessness. I am sitting on a hard wooden chair, a rocking chair, next to the monitor. By now I am so far, far away from anywhere I have ever been that I barely recognize my own voice asking a question. I know the thing to do is to turn and look directly at the doctor, and I do this. "What happens," I ask, "if the fever doesn't go down this time? What will we do?"

The answer is nothing. There will be nothing to do.

They had left the I.V. tube in her hand after the first dose of immunoglobulin in case they had to do it again. I didn't know that, now I do. Her father is on the way back to the Cape. I wait to call him until he's off the road, but he calls from the car. We decide he will stay with the other children. This time, Dr. Woodward takes the request for the immunoglobulin down to the lab herself. It is mixed quickly: the new dose starts three hours later.

By now, she has had Kawasaki disease for seven days, during which she's been feverish for all but three hours. At night, she and I sleep in the same bed. In the middle of the third night, she sits bolts upright in bed and screams, "Where's my mommy?" The immunoglobulin drips into her arm through the clear tube. Wires cover her chest. Despite the tube, she tries to get out of bed. "I'm looking for my mommy!" she screams. Her body is covered with wires, the fluids leach from the I.V. into her bandaged hand.

"Don't look at the monitor," the nurses say. "It doesn't mean anything." When it flashes, they run in to check. Four aspirins a day keep her blood from clotting, and I grind them up and put them in her blueberry yogurt. "Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down," sings Julie Andrews, on the video screen. Everyone passing by looks in and says, "I love Mary Poppins."

She has two echocardiograms. Her heart is like a pulsing flower. She lies on her side while I tell her the story of "The Nutcracker Prince." She is coated like a jujube with blue jelly. We go further and further into the forest. We learn the first findings. The function of her left ventricle is slightly depressed; there is a small pericardial effusion, which means she has fluid around her heart; her aortic root is at the upper limits of what's considered normal, as is her left coronary artery. This is what they would expect to find with acute Kawasaki disease. When I was a little girl, I played every summer on the same beach where my children play now, with the children of my parents' friends. When the phone next rings, it is one of these friends. Now he is a pediatric cardiologist. Listen to me, he says. He sets up appointments—here, there—

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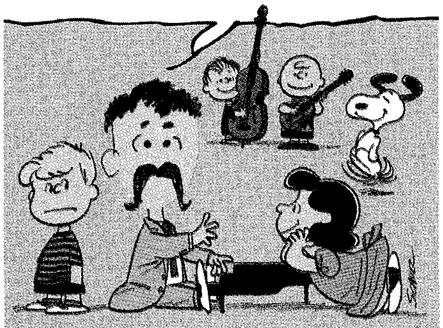

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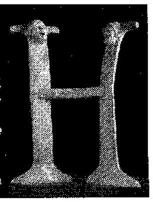

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for when we return to New York. I call Dr. Lazarus in New York. Good, he says. Good. These are the people to see.

The second treatment works. She eats a dish of rice and peas. The nurse comes in every hour and checks her temperature. I become more superstitious than ever. I cross my fingers. Her fever stays down.

We have not been outside the hospital for five days. The night before we leave, another child, a little boy, is admitted with Kawasaki disease. His mother is a nurse. "I called my friend on the way here," she says, "and I said, 'Look it up.' My friend called me right back, and started reading." The mother pauses. She is in tears. "I thought, How can he have something I've never heard of? I had to pull off the road."

I decide to make the homecoming festive, and take the ferry across Cape Cod Bay to Provincetown. Her grandmother accompanies us. The day is warm and windy, and the bay glistens. If her fever goes up even half of one degree, we are to return to the hospital immediately. Over the next days, I will put my hand on her forehead so often she swats me away; back in New York, she'll see four doctors in three weeks, and the one they all lead to, a large, kind man, the wizard at the very center of the maze, who listens to her heart intently for a full five minutes while she sits absolutely still, as she has learned to do, will say to me, in early October, She's fine. Her left aortic root may be slightly enlarged, but she's fine. Two weeks later, she'll cough while she's eating breakfast and I'll start to shake and have to leave the room.

When the ferry pulls in, the wind stops. Her father brings the other children to meet us at the dock. She has slept on my lap during the ride, and the button on my jacket has made a red mark on her face. The children are horrified: all their anxiety is centered on that one splotch. What did they do to her face? they cry.

There is news right away. The waves are good, the waves are bad. They ate marshmallows. The biggest news is the mouse. They have found an infant mouse, in the grass at Lev and Joseph's house, and Daddy said they could keep it.

"No mice," I say.

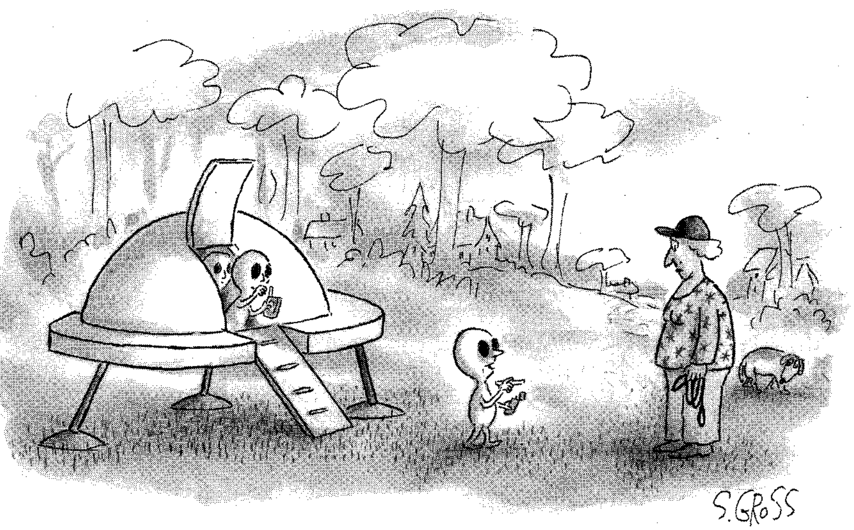
I am instantly a pariah.

"You can't tell them they can't have this mouse," their father says.

"What?" I say. We have been down this route before. We have two turtles, two cats, a fish, and four children, and we are not going to have a mouse.

"Wait," he says.

When we arrive on the top of the hill, the door to the cottage is plastered with homemade welcome-home signs. The mouse is in a matchbox. Hairless, pink, it is only a little bigger than a fingernail. They found it the night we went to the hospital, and have kept it alive by loading a grass stalk with milk and waiting while he sucks it. They have taken it in turn to do this. ♦



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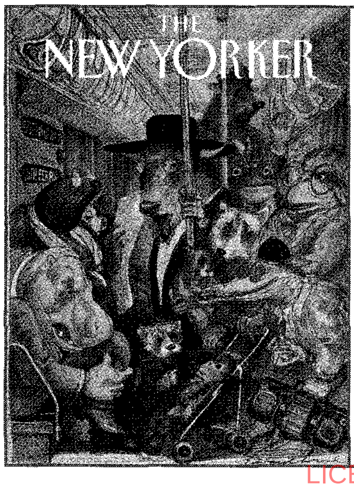

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by Edward Sorel

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THE JAZZ SINGER

A life on the wild side.

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

I have a handwritten family tree of uncertain provenance, according to which my father's mother's family, the Whitburns, splits into two branches around 1670. One branch, descended from the elder son, stayed in Cornwall: they were landowners and worked as accountants and agents for the tin mines. The other branch—my branch, descended from the younger son, Deggery—went to sea. My great-great-great-grandfather, a sea captain born in 1811, had three sons. The eldest died of the plague in Glasgow in 1886; the third, the captain of the S.S. Mexicano, was lost in 1877, with all of his crew, on a voyage from the West Indies. But the second son, fortunately for me and mine, survived longer than his brothers: he sailed to India on the Tiger to work on the railways and lived to retire to Cornwall. His son William, my great-grandfather, hated England and ran away to sea when he was fourteen.

William Whitburn ended up, like his father, in India, became an engineer, and married Gladys Hughes, whose family had been living on the subcontinent for several generations and had become, as people then put it, Anglo-Banglo. Those of mixed blood were generally scorned by English and Indians alike, but somehow Gladys's mother—dark as a Bengali, definitely more Banglo than Anglo in appearance—slipped through the social net and married an Englishman, and her color, diluted past suspicion in her offspring, was not discussed. Her skin passed out of the family, but not so her contour: the shape and consistency of a trifle, short, large-bosomed, and tub-hipped, she provided the prototype for two generations of Whitburn women—a shape maintained, despite the considerable counterforces of hunting, tennis, riding, gardening, and training dogs, by the ingestion of astounding subcontinental quantities of curry and rice and sticky sweets and equally astounding English quantities of alcohol.

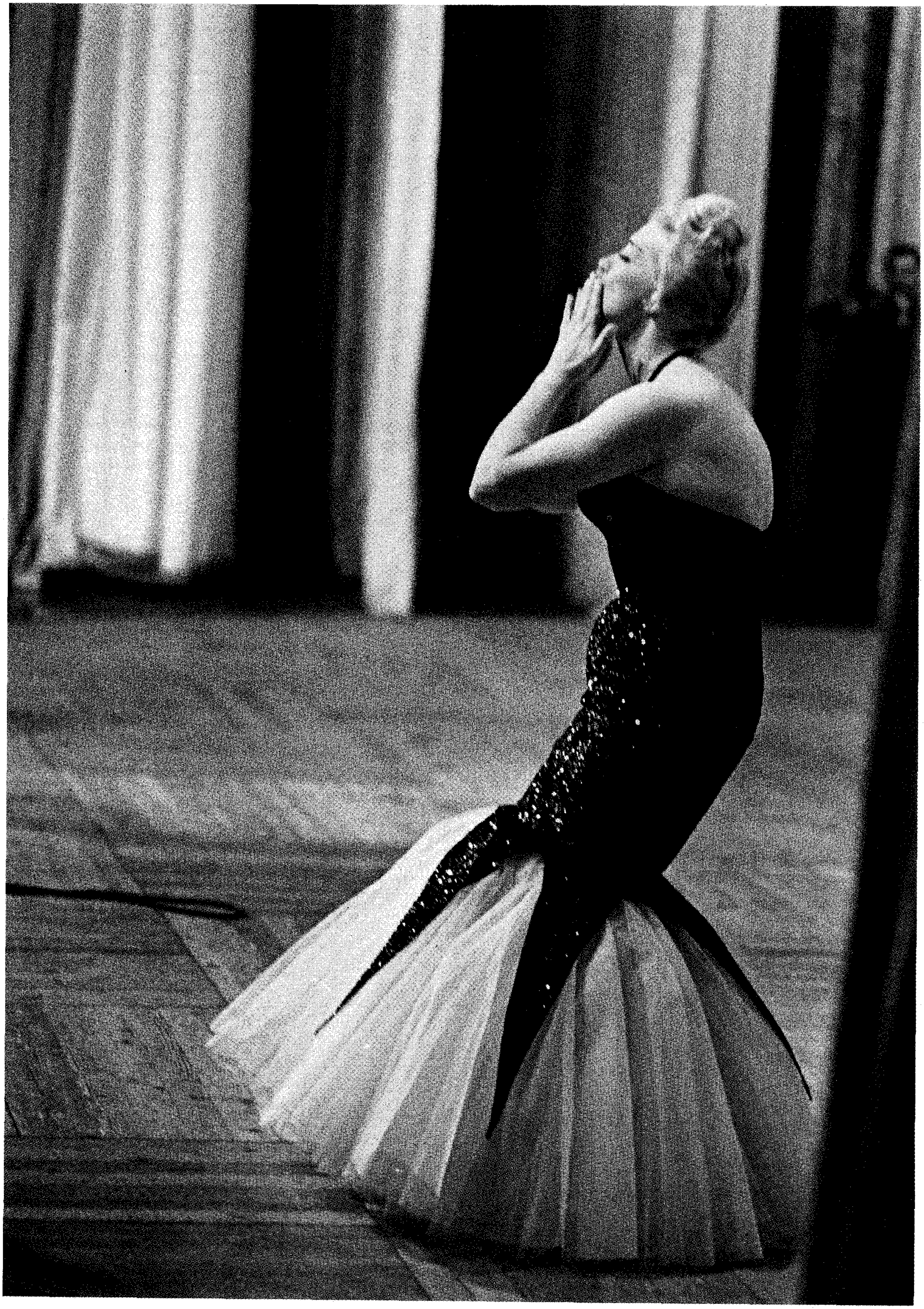
William Whitburn was a big man, six feet two or three, with bulky features and mottled skin that seemed pressed out of coarse clay with thick thumbs. He looked crude and male and took advantage of the fact that many women found him attractive. Gladys Hughes was just five feet, but she exercised over her husband as much control as was feasible and pleasant. The Whitburns moved around India, following his work—the building of bridges and roads. They had, in those days, four children: my grandmother Berenice, known throughout her life as Toddles, born in 1906; Robert, 1908; Lucette, 1910; and Edgar, 1912. In 1918, all four children were packed off to boarding school in England, and the senior Whitburns moved a thousand miles across the country, from Calcutta, on the east coast, where they'd met, to Bombay, all the way west, on the Arabian Sea.

Early in 1923, Gladys, at the mortifying age of thirty-six, became pregnant again. Her condition was the result, William told people, of A.B.C.—absolute bloody carelessness—and Gladys tried her best to get rid of it. She and William rode a motorcycle over bumpy roads. She drank things. Nothing worked, however, and the child, Diana Geraldine, was born on October 5th and christened in Bombay Cathedral. My grandmother Toddles, who was seventeen at the time, commented, upon receiving the news, "How disgusting." It was, in fact, rather disgusting, since Diana was born with dysentery.

Diana, my great-aunt, grew up to be a cabaret singer, stage name Gery Scott. She worked all over the world until, owing to will, flair, and stupid mistakes, she fetched up in her late fifties in Australia. If it hadn't been for the will, she might have stayed in India and married, like her sisters. If it hadn't been for the stupid mistakes, she might have played out her career in London: singing in night clubs after the war until the big bands died and pop took over, then retreating to humiliating seaside restaurants in Brighton or Blackpool. As it was, she was forced early into narrower, odder channels: into countries that hadn't heard that the big bands had died, and where the night life of the forties and fifties—the cocktails, the music-with-dinner, the dancing-after-dinner, the long, slow drunk of an eight-hour evening—continued undisturbed. She left London for East Germany and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and Bangkok in the sixties, when the G.I.s came, and oil towns in Iran before the revolution. In the course of things, she changed her name four times and cut her hair short and dyed it platinum blond. Her features shifted as they hardened into the form of her character: her mouth setting into a stubborn line; her chin pushing forward; her nose broadening from decades of flared nostrils. She retained her plummy accent, which garnered her the uncomplimentary nickname of Duchess.

Diana now lives in Canberra, in a small brick bungalow crowded with objects of sentimental value: a miniature Korean crown encased in plastic; crystal decanters; heavy cut-glass ashtrays from when she smoked (she finally quit a year ago, after her doctor told her that her circulation would give out and he'd have to cut off her legs). She has a white dog, Bea, who is blind in one eye and half-blind in the other and careers around the house, barking at nothing. Because Diana was the last child by many years, she has outlived nearly everyone she's known. Her family is in England now, under the

Diana Diamond, who performed under the name of Gery Scott, in Kiev in 1961. She sang as if she were sipping a Martini in a bath.



COURTESY GERY SCOTT

ground: her parents in Buckinghamshire; one sister in Kingston upon Thames and the other in Hampshire; her brothers in Richmond; her first husband she's not sure where, possibly Brighton; her third husband in Norfolk, near the house where he was murdered. Only her second husband is still alive, running a hotel in Bavaria with his second wife. Diana has made a life for herself in Canberra, a fifth or sixth or seventh life, singing in clubs again and teaching jazz; but when she thinks about cremation it seems to her a hollow chance that her ashes should fall on this desert suburb, four thousand miles in a line through the earth from England, even though England has never been home.

The Whitburns were the sort of English family that valued toughness above almost everything: not fighting toughness—toughness to endure pain or, more often, humiliation, with humor and unsentimentality intact. Toughness doesn't always come naturally, and so it must be bred into English children by the application of mockery and physical unpleasantness, until the soft belly of childhood becomes calloused and fit for life's travails. Diana's mother, Gladys, was a chain-smoker who used to shoot crocodiles, not from the shore, like other people, but point-blank in the head, wading among them into the river. She expected fortitude from her children: her usual response to their complaints was "Don't *fuss*." When William beat Lucette, Diana's second sister, as a child, she called her bruises her medals. Diana didn't have the Whitburn toughness, not at first, and that made her life difficult. Her sisters loved to hunt, to kill tigers, to suck the fat in a cut of meat. But Diana cried the first time she shot a stag, and she couldn't finish the job—her father had to kill it for her, and she never hunted again. All her life, in her family, Diana was soft, the baby, a mess. "Toddles would say, 'Oh, the little Cinderella!' " Diana says. "She thought it was funny that I didn't have money and had to go to her for help."

Shortly after Diana was born, William got into a dispute with his employers and resigned in a huff. He took a job as a district engineer, working for the British government in Sargodha, in the Punjab, just inside what later became the border of Pakistan. The family kept horses in a stable behind the house—they hunted on Thursdays and Sundays—and there were separate quarters for the servants, of whom there were many: servants for the horses, servants for the garden, cooks, someone to heat water for baths, an untouchable to dispose of the waste from the toilets. In addition to the horses, the family kept thirteen dogs, a cacophony of chickens, geese, and ducks, a white cockatoo, and a mongoose. The Whitburns tended to prefer animals to people. When Lucette saw Toddles's first child, my newborn father, she said, "Ugh, I'd rather have dogs"—a comment for which my grandfather never forgave her but which her parents and siblings found perfectly natural. Years later, when Diana left her second husband and he, weeping, called up Lucette for consolation, her immediate, alarmed inquiry—"What's going to happen to the dogs?"—revealed to him finally (and, given the circumstances, probably fortunately) that there was something about the Whitburn women and his emotional requirements that simply didn't mix.

WORLD'S GREATEST DAD
FREE TOY INSIDE!
Shanahan

Sargodha was a Remount Depot, an Army center crowded with cavalry troops, so there were always plenty of young men and plenty of horses. Toddles and Lucette became excellent riders, and were among the few women in the station to play polo. Punjabis were horse breeders, so William built a racecourse. Later, he built a dog track, too, and imported greyhounds from Australia, one of whom, Lassie, was killed by a panther—eaten right off the chain. When the family first arrived in Sargodha, there was no church, so William built St. Fillan's, next to the Club, in which Toddles was the first person to be married, in 1929. The following year, Gladys took Diana, aged seven, to a movie called "The King of Jazz." Diana decided then that she wanted to be a jazz singer, and she never changed her mind.

Each spring, at the end of April, Sargodha would become too hot for women and children, and the family would decamp to a hill station in Kashmir. They drove to Lahore in their Buick, then, along with the car, boarded a train, the Frontier Mail, to Rawalpindi, then got back in the Buick and drove the twisting, dangerous mountain road, with Diana vomiting—"Out the window, Diana, out the window!"—all the way to Srinagar. They rented a houseboat on Dhal Lake and stayed there until the weather on the plains grew cool again, in October. The lake was covered with lotus blossoms and surrounded by pine trees, and there were dozens of houseboats moored around it, inhabited by other European families, who visited each other in rowboats. Gladys played the banjo and Lucette and Toddles played the ukulele on deck at night.

In 1932, Diana, eight years old and speaking Hindustani as well as she spoke English, was shipped off to boarding school in Sussex. She left from Bombay, accompanied by Gladys, for the four-week journey on an Italian liner that sailed through the Suez Canal. When she arrived in London, she met her brother Edgar for the first time. He was twenty then, a successful amateur boxer and aspiring actor, very good-looking, and a fan of pop and jazz. All through the summer of 1932, before Diana went to school, he played her his music: Chick Webb, Fletcher Henderson, Bing Crosby, the Boswell Sisters. He bought her a secondhand gramophone and her first jazz records: "Them There Eyes" and "When You're Smiling," by Louis Armstrong.

What a cruel contrast it was to go from Louis Armstrong and London and handsome Edgar to the High Church Anglo-Catholic convent in which Diana then found herself. Hail Marys every day at the noon bell. On Fridays, a lunch of boiled, unsalted cod that Diana chewed and chewed until it formed a dry paste that stuck in her throat and wouldn't go down, the nuns telling her that she was a wicked girl who would be punished by God if she didn't finish it. On her first night in the dormitory, she was told by Matron to get undressed, but she just sat there, petrified: she didn't know how—her ayah had always done it for her. She ran away three times, twice to the bottom of the garden, but the third time as far as the railway station. Back at the convent, she was locked in a small bedroom. There was a rainstorm in the afternoon, and the Head Sister told her that God was sending down the thunder and lightning to punish her for her sin.

In the summer of 1940, Diana, aged sixteen, was evacuated from school and sent back to India on a troop ship for the rest of the war. The ship sailed the long way, around the Cape of Good Hope, in order to avoid submarines in the Mediterranean. Shortly before Diana left, Edgar realized that his frisky little sister, about to spend several weeks on a ship with seven hundred and fifty sailors, could benefit from some timely information, and so he told her about the birds and the bees. Seven hundred and fifty sailors! It was really a miracle, Diana reflected afterward, that she disembarked in Bombay with her virginity intact—a state that did not survive her first year back in the tropics.

When Diana turned seventeen, the Maharaja of Orchha state, a friend of her father's, threw her a birthday bash, a kind of coming-out party, and Diana, who wasn't used to cocktails, became extravagantly drunk.

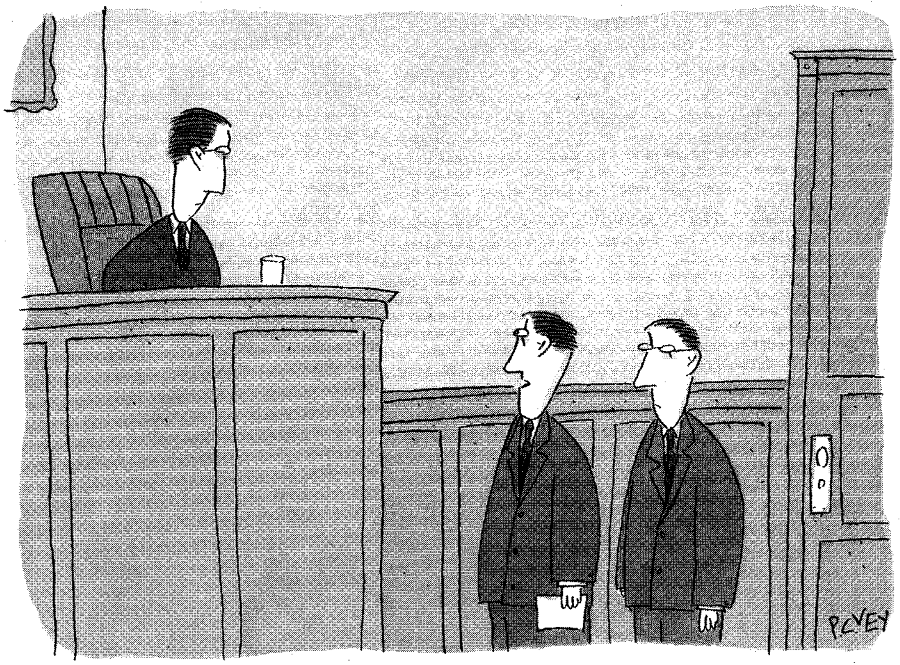
"Did you enjoy your party, Diana?" her father asked dryly the next morning.

"Yes, Father."

"I noticed that you rather liked the drink, Diana."

"Yes, I did."

"Well let me give you a word of advice, child. If you like to drink, don't drink like a woman. Don't mess around with cocktails and stupid drinks. If you're going to drink, drink Scotch. During the day, drink gin. And never be frightened of anyone except a drunk." With these words, William Whitburn launched his daughter into the world.



"We would like to request a change of venue to an entirely different legal system."

• •

Late afternoon fading into early evening, 1942. Across from the outdoor stage there is a hill, and all the way up the hill are thousands and thousands of American soldiers, so many that they look like starlings, waiting for Diana to sing. The British have just been thrown out of Burma by the Japanese, and the Americans have travelled to Assam, in northeast India, to help them. Diana is eighteen; her hair is long and chestnut-colored, and she is wearing her first real stage dress, of silver lamé, which clings tightly to her, hung from her shoulders by tiny straps. What a creature she is: the great arched prow of a Whitburn

CONTACT

bosom, and only eighteen, and the silver dress. The soldiers go mad for her. The captain asks if she will sing a request, "Stardust," and she stands on the stage and sings into the warm afternoon:

And now the purple dusk of twilight time
Steals across the meadows of my heart.
High up in the sky the little stars climb,
Always reminding me that we're apart.
You wander down the lane and far away,
Leaving me a song that will not die.
Love is now the stardust of yesterday,
The music of the years gone by.

Diana became a singer when she was eighteen. No one in the family regarded this development with unmixed pleasure—there was talk of prostitution and ending in the gutter—but it was hardest for Toddles. When she was eighteen, she had begged to go to Milan to train as an opera singer (she had a beautiful contralto voice and might have succeeded), but William forbade it. No daughter of his was going on the stage. So she, his favorite, who always obeyed him, got married instead. But by the time Diana arrived back in India William had not been a father of young children for many years, and he was less inclined to discipline. Besides, Diana was fun. "I said things, I did things, that were absolutely taboo in my sisters' time," she says. "I wanted to do something, I did it! I wanted to screw, I screwed! I think they were both a bit shattered by it. But my father found this in some strange way a joy."

Diana went to live with Toddles and her husband, Alexander MacFarquhar, known as Mark, who had taken a large house at 5 Dupleix Road in Delhi, not far from the parliament. (After fifteen years spent working as a district officer in the Punjab, he had been posted to the capital.) Toddles was a crack bridge player—she boasted that she played with Omar Sharif when he was one of the best players in the world—and she was a superb hostess and cook, famous for her curries and roasts and carrot halvah and pâtés. (Until last year, the Imperial Hotel in Delhi offered "Lady MacFarquhar's chutney" on its menu.) There were always people around the house, always parties. Diana went to work for MI6, British intelligence, in the filing department, and she bestowed her virginity upon a young English Army officer who was subsequently captured in the fall of Singapore. When the Americans arrived in Delhi, Diana joined the Red Cross and volunteered to entertain the troops. In fact, she made such a thorough and heartfelt commitment to the military for the duration of the war that she was rumored, according to my father, to have given pyorrhea, a gum disease, to an entire regiment.

At some point in the early forties, William and Gladys moved back to Calcutta—he was the engineer in charge of building runways for the B-29s that came in for the bombing of Tokyo—and Diana went with them. She made her first recording there—"Stormy Weather," with an American jazz musician, Teddy Weatherford—and she had a wonderful time. She would receive telegrams from American pilots in China, asking for a date with her upon their return—breakfast, usually, because she was always engaged for lunch and dinner. She stayed out until four or five in the morning, and had six proposals of marriage before she was twenty-one, including one from the son of a maharaja. But then, after so much fun, the *coup de foudre:* Captain George Dupres (his name has been changed), a pilot from Philadelphia, who looked like Fred Astaire but taller, and danced nearly as well. Diana adored him. He used to "fly the hump"—steer little Dakotas down low between the peaks of the Himalayas, in the hope of avoiding Japanese fire, on his way to deliver supplies to troops in China. The route was treacherous, and many of the pilots who flew it were killed. Gladys didn't like George, but when he proposed to Diana she ordered the wedding dress and the invitations.

On October 5th, Diana's twenty-first birthday, he was due to fly back from China to Calcutta to take her out to dinner. She dressed and waited for him. Seven went by. Eight went by. Nine. She was frantic. Because of wartime security, the airport wasn't giving out any information about planes coming in. Finally, late at night, her father, an Army major, called up the airport and pulled rank to find out what was going on. He was told that Captain Dupres wasn't expected back: he had departed that morning for the United States to rejoin his wife and children. Gladys raged and cried "I told you so" until William told her, "Go to bed, chum, go to bed." He and Diana sat up all night together and drank an entire bottle of rum. The next day, miserable and hung over and dreading pity, Diana announced that she was leaving: going to England to be a singer.

Diana was never taught to sing: she learned by imitation. Not her style Lena Horne's sweet, soft, ladylike soprano or, worse, the nasal tinniness of Billie Holiday. "A squeaky, dreadful, unhappy voice," Diana says. Her great love was Sarah Vaughan, whom she met once in Germany: the lush, low alto, as rich as a bass, with such intensely controlled force it sounded almost menacing. Diana didn't have Vaughan's voice—she was neither so daunting nor so flawless. She took as a working model, instead, June Christy, a cool-jazz singer in America.

June Christy had a big, broad, open-throated sound, unhurried and deep-voiced from the chest; a little scratchy, a little smoky. She meandered through songs as though she were leaning back in a chair—as though she were talking to you and making up the words and the rhythms as she went along. She sang clear out, with only a soft vibrato warming the ends of the notes. Diana listened to her records again and again, trying to copy her style. And over the years, over sixty years of Diana's smoking and easing into her performance, her voice grew even deeper and slower and more conversational than Christy's. She sang as if she were sipping a Martini in a bath. She grew to loathe the aggressive, electric-drill vibrato that was the sound, she felt, of prissy amateurs with operatic ambitions. Instead of garlanding her vowels with vibrato, she leaned, swaying, into the consonants—the "l" in "cool," the "ng" in "nothing," the "m" in "come." She didn't belt, she didn't warble; she hummed and savored.

Diana arrived in London in the winter of 1944 carrying a letter of introduction from Ross Parker, who was in charge of entertainment for the British forces in India and the co-composer of the song "There'll Always Be an England." The letter got her an audition with Harry Roy, one of the top bandleaders in London, whose band played

Diana has made a new life for herself, a fifth or sixth or seventh life, singing in clubs again. Photograph by Stephen Dupont.

MIDLIFE CRISIS: THE CLOUDS BEFORE THE STORM
What would happen if I got a tattoo?
I bet if I really wanted to, I could bicycle across Canada.
Man, I hate all our furniture.

at the Milroy club. Diana turned up at Roy's flat wearing a leopard-skin coat that her parents had given her for her twenty-first birthday. Roy answered the door in a red silk dressing gown, which shocked her, because she wasn't used to strange men greeting her in their dressing gowns, much less in the afternoon. Roy was tiny—shorter than Diana. He steered her to his white grand piano and told her to take her coat off. "That's good, I like a girl with big tits," he said when he saw her without it. He booked her to start that night at nine for a set ending at five in the morning. The first night went beautifully, but on the second night Roy came up behind Diana and pinched her bottom. After the song was over, she told him never to do that again and pinched his bottom. At the end of the night, she was fired and told that her career was over. But a month later another friend of Ross Parker's offered her a job at a night club on New Bond Street, the Orchid Room, and in the summer of 1945 she beat out a hundred people auditioning for the job of girl singer on the BBC's "Charlie Chester" show, the top radio program in Britain, which featured a famous eighteen-piece orchestra called the Blue Rockets.

At the end of that year, New Year's Eve 1945-46, the Blue Rockets were invited to play at the Chelsea Arts Ball, at the Albert Hall, and Diana was to sing with them. The ball was one of the grandest social events of the season, a fancy-dress affair that hadn't been held since 1938, because of the war, and which was to be broadcast on the BBC. The Blue Rockets weren't due to begin broadcasting until midnight, and, to kill time before they went on, someone passed around a sweet liqueur that tasted of cherries. Diana, not wanting to seem weak, took several swigs. After a while, she began to feel sick. Just before midnight, the band was called to take its place on the dance floor; Diana said she had to go to the ladies' room and would be right there. She woke up, still in the ladies' room, at five in the morning. Her contract with the Blue Rockets was ripped in half, and the BBC banned her from its broadcasts and recordings for life.

Was there a Mickey Finn in the drink, which made her, certainly no stranger to alcohol, succumb? Diana still wonders what might have happened if she hadn't slept through that concert. Might she have become a big British star like Shirley Bassey? Even now, the name Shirley Bassey bothers her. Certainly she was more than punished for her sins: she took a job singing at a Butlin's Holiday Camp—a low-rent English hybrid of Club Med and Maoist youth brigades—and then another with the Vic Lewis Orchestra. Vic Lewis took Stan Kenton as his model, but England wasn't quite ready for his brand of jazz, and though the orchestra travelled from the top of the country to the bottom in a tour bus, performing one-night stands, it made very little money and nobody got any sleep. After six months on the road, Diana had a nervous breakdown, took a boat back to India, and retreated to the slow comforts of the Raj.

What could there be for Diana in India after her career ended for the second time? What else could there be for an English girl returning, shaken, to her parents at the spinsterish age of twenty-four but a lovely amusing irretrievable alcoholic named Patrick Lofting? William and Gladys had moved south after India became independent, in 1947; William had a job managing land for the Nawab of Bhopal, and Pat Lofting was the Nawab's chief pilot. He was a very good pilot, especially for an alcoholic; he was also the nephew of Hugh Lofting, the author of the Dr. Dolittle books, and appropriately cheerful. Diana was feeling small and "nesty." She didn't want to get married particularly, but she wanted a baby, and she wanted it to be born in holy wedlock, so she married Pat and, in 1949, gave birth to her first and only child, Christopher.

The days in Bhopal were short: the Nawab, a Muslim, was stripped of his lands by the new Indian government after partition and sent off to Pakistan; Pat and Diana moved to London, and things grew nasty. Pat drank away what little money they had, and when it ran out he got a job in the Royal Air Force and was posted to the Suez Canal zone. Diana waited in vain for him to send letters or money, then decided to leave him. As she always did in a crisis, she ran to Toddles for help. She took Christopher and sailed to Karachi, where Mark was running the education and commerce departments for the new Pakistani government. She sat in Karachi for a year, getting fat on curry and misery.

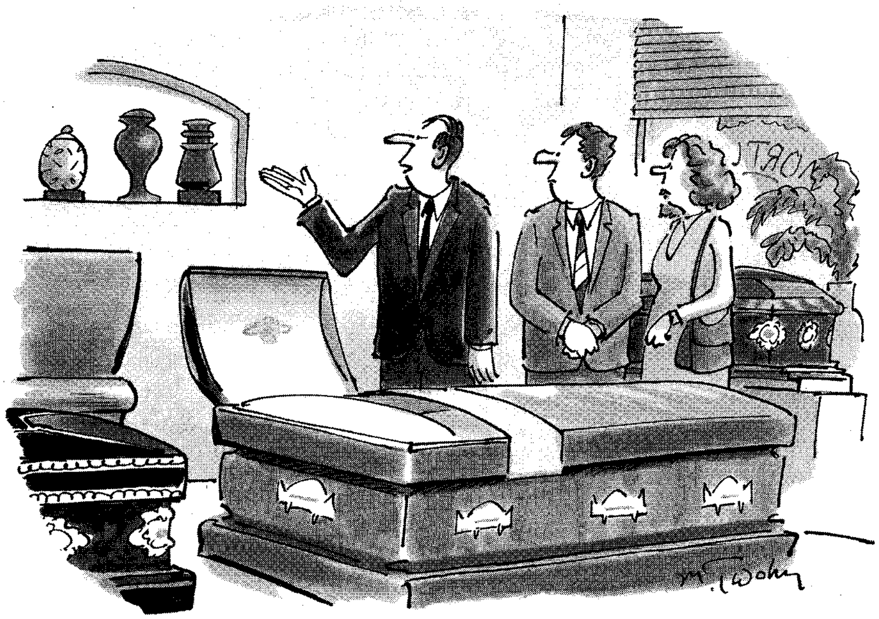
Finally, her self-respect reasserted itself. She flew back to England, lost the weight, cut her hair, and dyed it. She took the stage name Gery Scott (Gery for her middle name, Geraldine, Scott for her ancestry), and in so doing gave birth to an alter ego that proved very useful. Gery, foulmouthed and bottle-blond, at once bolder and more vulnerable, was the mercurial diva; brunet Diana was the stoic, unsentimental product of her family. When Diana's marriages fell apart, when she had no money, when she did something ruinously stupid and ended up fired, suicidal, or in jail, she felt herself a failure, but for Gery it was show biz—it was all cabaret. Gery Scott left Christopher with his grandmother and went off to entertain the American troops in Europe.

In the summer of 1955, at the height of the Cold War, Gery was invited to perform at a big music festival in East Germany. Communist officials had come around to jazz in the fifties, because they had been led, by Paul Robeson among others, to understand that real jazz (as opposed to white commercialization) was the music of the oppressed American Negro. By that time, Gery was well known: she had sung with Chet Baker and the Woody Herman band and had gone solo—she was living in sin in Wiesbaden with her accompanist, a handsome German pianist named Igo, with whom she travelled to gigs all over Europe, east and west. She had a recording contract with Supraphon, in Prague, and her recording of "When the Saints Go Marching In" was No. 1 on the Czechoslovakian hit parade for more than a year.

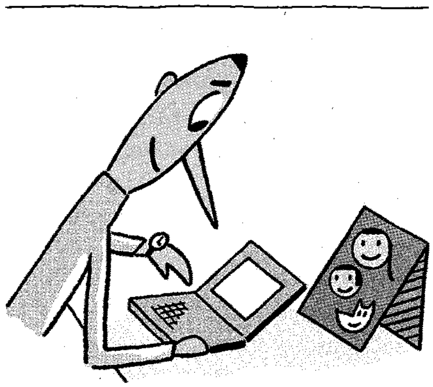
The music festival was to take place on an open-air stage in a park, and officials expected an audience of more than seventy thousand. They were quite nervous about it, and they were adamant that Gery sing only pretty songs—*nichts zu heiss*, nothing too "hot"—but at the same time they were very keen that she sing her signature hit, "When the Saints Go Marching In," because it was Dixieland and most definitely the music of the oppressed American Negro. Diana explained that it was a fast song that could get quite *heiss*, but the officials insisted that she go ahead and sing it nonetheless. The park was teeming. There was an East German Dixieland band, a jazz singer from Romania, a jazz singer from Hungary, singers and bands from all over the place, but they were all warmup acts for Gery, who would close the show. By the end of her set, everybody was yelling for more, and when at last she sang "When the Saints Go Marching In" the crowd went wild, clapping and screaming and singing along. As she was taking her bows and saying thank you, a little boy about ten years old slipped onto the stage, through a two-man-deep cordon of policemen, thrust a copy of her record at her, and begged her to sign it. Gery was so high and the boy was so small that she did.

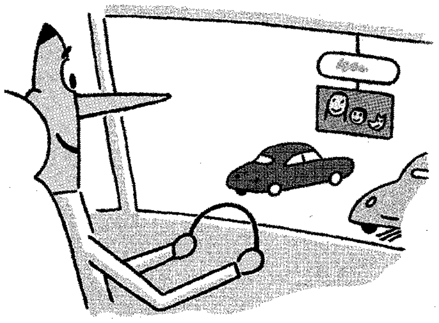
At that moment, the crowd broke through the cordon and rushed the stage. Gery, terrified, ran backward and fell down the stage steps, and a thick piece of wood sliced into her calf. She screamed in pain, Igo screamed in fear, seventy thousand people were screaming with excitement, police whistles and sirens were going off, but before a doctor could remove the wood from her leg the police rushed into the Red Cross tent and demanded that she and Igo get in their car and drive straight to the border without stopping. They were accompanied to the border by the East German police, and drove eleven hours to Prague, where they were due to make a record the next day. By the time they arrived, Gery's leg was so swollen that she was worried about gangrene. A week later, *Neues Deutschland*, the East German equivalent of *Pravda*, carried an article stating that Western entertainers were not to be allowed to come to East Germany to try to coerce the young people into revolution. Gery was declared persona non grata, and was never invited to perform in East Germany again.

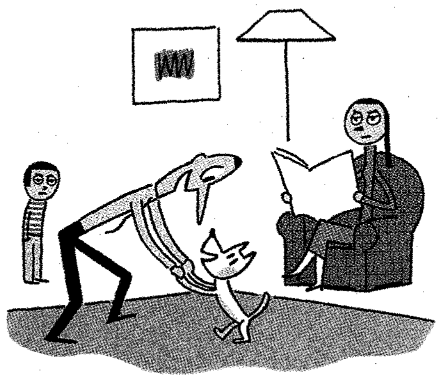
Being declared persona non grata in East Germany might have ended her career in the Eastern bloc, but a few years later Gery was invited to do a thirteen-city, seventy-five-concert tour through the Soviet Union, from Moscow and Leningrad to Kiev, Tbilisi, Odessa, and Baku. It was an extraordinary time to launch such a tour. Jazz, seen as an American attempt at cultural infiltration, had been repressed in the Soviet Union after the war, and semi-tone "blue notes," plucking a bass instead of bowing it, chords built on flatted fifths, and trumpet mutes were all condemned. In 1949, officials had confiscated every saxophone in Moscow. As a consequence, jazz had become the music of the underground, and the jazz "spirit" almost a religion of self-expression and authenticity. Then,



"We also have urns, if you want to think outside the box."







for a brief period after Stalin died, from the mid-fifties to the early sixties, jazz was permitted: the underground emerged, and suddenly bop, cool jazz, Dixieland, and big band were everywhere. Gery arrived in 1961, one of the first Western jazz performers to perform after the thaw.

By the time the tour started, three million of Gery's records had been sold in the country, and everybody knew who Gery Scottova was. In Leningrad, people slept outside all night in line for tickets, and when her concerts were postponed they broke the doors and windows of the ticket office and there were riots in the streets. "Particularly striking in her concerts were the songs reflecting the folklore of various peoples of the world," the Tass News Service wrote in April, reporting on her tour. "Sharoyev"—a Moscow director—"points out with regret that in certain cases Gery Scott performed pieces of an outspokenly modernist style. But there were, luckily, not many such works in her programme." In Moscow, the wife of the British Ambassador decided that Gery was too big a star to gad about with Igo unsanctioned, and so, though she had never been a fan of marriage and had happily lived with him for eleven years, Gery consented to get married in the Moscow Palace of Weddings.

On the morning of April 12, 1961—the day that Yuri Gagarin shot up in the Vostok to become the first man in space—Gery woke up in Kiev with laryngitis. She had done sixty concerts in thirty days and she could barely squeak. Igo rang up the Kiev Opera House in a panic (Igo always panicked)—Gery had two sold-out concerts there that night, and of course it was no ordinary night. The opera house sent over a doctor, who looked at Gery's throat. "Don't worry," he said. Half an hour before the concert, the doctor showed up at the opera house and injected a syringe full of cortisone straight into Gery's voice box. Later, back in London, she discovered that the injection could have so damaged her throat that she might never have spoken again, but that night she sang as she had never sung before. She was wearing an extraordinary dress—red sequins, strapless, low-cut, mermaid-shaped. She sang two two-hour concerts, back to back, with encores, and at the end of each she sang "How High the Moon." The audience, swelled with pride and happiness about the Vostok, went wild. They made her sing it again and again and again:

> Somewhere there's music—
> How faint the tune;
> Somewhere there's heaven—
> How high the moon.
> The darkest night would shine,
> If you would come to me soon;
> Until you will, how still my heart,
> How high the moon.

She drew it out, scatting like Ella Fitzgerald, but better than Ella, more divine than Ella, for that one night.

In the late fifties, Igo and Gery went to Asia. They were hired for a six-month stint in Ceylon in 1957, and that led to bookings in Hong Kong and Japan and Bangkok. Gery was friendly with Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister of Malaysia, who came to hear her sing in Kuala Lumpur. She took up agenting on the side, and booked acts from Europe and America—Manfred Mann, the Kinks, Dave Brubeck, Louis Armstrong, Thelonious Monk, even Shirley Bassey. She brought a troupe of British wrestlers to Hong Kong, where wrestling was extremely popular on television. She thought it would make her rich, but a stray riot ruined the event, and instead she lost thousands and ended up in debt and in jail.

Bangkok was something else altogether. "Bangkok in the sixties was anything goes," Gery says. "It was absolutely sensational. The Vietnam War was on, and Bangkok was the Americans' R. and R. station. The Thais had never been colonized, so their attitude was very free. Dope was legal, prostitution was an art, money could buy anything. It was wild." Even in the sixties, there were prostitutes younger than thirteen in the seamiest bars in Khlong Toei and go-go dancers in Krung Thep. Go-go dancing had been imported in 1967 by the Dutch manager of the Café de Paris on Suriwong Road: the girls didn't have costumes—he pasted feathers on them and they danced in cages next to a giant fan until all the feathers blew off. G.I.s would get drunk and fight—there were stabbings and shootings all the time. Once, a bar hostess threw gasoline over another who'd filched her G.I. client, and burned her to death in the middle of Patpong Road.

Seven nights a week, Gery and Igo

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

had a gig at the Cat's Eye. The set would begin at eight, and they'd play until one or two, then stop off and have a bowl of noodles in Patpong, where the restaurants were open very late. They had a friend, a black American soldier, who'd taken his discharge in Bangkok and started a jazz club, the South Seas Bar, which opened at midnight and had a pool in which the hostesses swam naked. Gery and Igo would go there from Patpong and play until five in the morning. The local night-life columnist, Bernard Trink, the infamous "Nite Owl," wrote about Gery regularly and called her "Southeast Asia's first queen of song."

Christopher, Gery's son, who had rejoined her by then, was a feral teen-ager who played saxophone and sang in a band called the Mouldy Cheese. One Sunday morning, Gery was cooking curry (they always had a curry lunch on Sundays) when he called down from upstairs.

"Mum!" he said. Gery looked up. He was leaning over the rail in his pajamas.

"What is it?"

"Mum, can we go to the doctor? Is there a doctor on Sunday?"

"I should think so, why, what've you done?"

"I've got the clap."

"Oh, all right then."

Igo had a fit. "Vot are you doink? How can you talk to your muzzer like zat?"

Since they'd married, Igo had become, to Gery's annoyance, a husband. He tried to tell her what to do, and she felt it didn't suit him. It certainly didn't suit her. "I stayed with Igo for eighteen years because we worked together, and he knew that," she says. "He was my accompanist, my little poodle, always walking two steps behind me, like poor Prince Philip."

Gery wanted a divorce, but Igo refused, so she went to a lawyer to see what he could do. The lawyer was working for a big American company—a C.I.A. man, as were most Americans working for big American companies in Bangkok in those days.

"People disappear very easily in this town, Gery," the lawyer said.

"Yes, I know."

"Well, let me just tell you this: if you leave two thousand baht on my desk, no questions will be asked."

"What do you mean?"

"Sweetheart, just put two thousand baht on my desk, you can do it when I'm not in the office, and you won't have any trouble with Igo again."

Gery was horrified. She went over to Lucette's house (Lucette was then living in Bangkok), and as they sat down with their first Scotches of the evening she told her what the lawyer had suggested.

"I've got two thousand baht," Lucette said.

"*Lucette!*" But that was Bangkok.

Finally, Igo agreed to a divorce, and for one glorious year, 1969, Gery Scott belonged to nobody. She was singing cabaret in the Merlin Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, and she was extremely popular with the gentlemen. "I was an unpaid prostitute," she says cheerfully. "I screwed anything that moved." But then another *coup de foudre:* she met a man who was to ruin her life more thoroughly, more painfully, and more ecstatically than anyone else.

"I met Tony in Singapore," she says. "In a bar, of course. I'd gone to the Goodwood Park Hotel to have dinner, and I was very lonely—I'd just arrived in town and I was in the middle of my divorce from Igo. A voice behind me said, 'Excuse me, aren't you Gery Scott?' Now, only somebody who's been through it will know what I mean, but you get sick to death of that. I was very well known—I was a medium star—and you can't eat a meal, can't walk into a bar, without someone asking for an autograph. So I thought, Here we go. He said, 'My name is Tony Diamond and you probably don't remember me.' I said no. He said, 'Well, you told me to fuck off about this time last year.' I said, 'Did I? Well, I suggest you do.' And he laughed and I laughed. He joined me at dinner and I went to bed with him that night."

Tony Diamond, a rich oilman from Australia, an industrial spy for the C.I.A. (he claimed), and a spectacular liar, was the love of Diana's life. He was thirty-six, she was forty-seven, and they were together for eleven years, until he left her. After six months with him, she did something she hadn't done for anyone, even her son: she gave up her work. Tony said he wanted to see her more, wanted her to travel with him, but that wasn't it. "He wouldn't let me earn, because he was the man," she says. "It was straight out of the fucking cave." Gery Scott became Diana again: the Diana of Calcutta days, living for love, no money of her own. But the years with Tony were her best years. They drank a lot and laughed a lot and cooked together and travelled all over the world. He bought her presents constantly—cars, dresses, art. He loved a big gesture: if she liked a painting in a restaurant, he'd buy it for her right off the wall. He bought a Bentley that was oak-panelled inside and had a small bar; she bought him a chauffeur's cap, and he'd drive the Bentley while she sat in the back and had a cocktail and waved at people out the window. They moved with his work, from Singapore to California, London, Scotland, Nigeria, and Iran.

The first year they were together, Tony gave Christopher, then twenty-one, two hundred dollars and a one-way ticket to Sydney and told him to get out and make a man of himself. Diana hated to see him go, but she said nothing. She changed her name to Diamond so she could travel as Tony's wife. She called him her husband, but he wasn't her husband—he had a wife already, in Australia. They lived in Iran for three years, in an oil town called Ahwaz, until they were thrown out by the revolution, in 1979. There were eight thousand expats there, with a lot of money and nothing to do, so everybody drank too much. Champagne was cheaper than water, and Diana and Tony had caviar and champagne every day for lunch. Tony allowed Diana to sing five concerts in Ahwaz, though not to get paid. She didn't have a pianist, so Tony decided to call up Igo in Germany, even though he and Gery hadn't spoken in years, since the divorce. "Baby," Tony told her when she begged him not to, "you can buy anything and you can buy anyone. Watch." He offered Igo fifteen hundred dollars for the week plus fare and expenses and told him to be in Iran for rehearsals on Monday. He was.

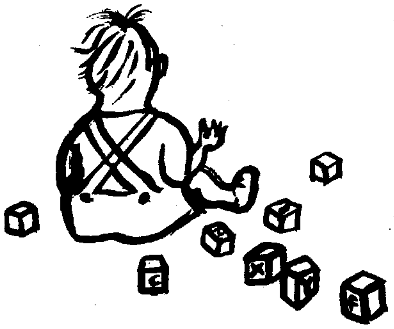
But then, after eleven years, Tony came home and told her he was leaving. He left her on her birthday, just as George Dupres had. He stood there, tears running down his face, and told her he had met another woman, an Australian woman, and he had to go back to his roots in Australia, where he belonged. His first wife had just died, and he wanted to marry again. He said, "Baby, I love you, but I need someone younger." Diana looked at him and responded with the first thing that came into her head: she started singing, "You've picked a fine time to leave me Lucille," in a country-and-Western accent. Tony was furious. "Because I was making fun of him in the middle of his big dramatic moment," Diana says. "With the tears! And the roots! And the I've-got-to-leave-you-though-I-love-you-really! And the woman he'd just met who was going to lead him down the path of righteousness or whatever it was!" Tony departed for Australia to marry the younger woman, Narelle—from whom, Diana heard with mixed feelings, he was divorced less than a year later, in order to marry a woman he'd met in Greece.

Diana, meanwhile, went to pieces. She took an overdose of pills. She lost thirty-six pounds in six weeks. She called up her friend Peggy to cry on the phone and Peggy said that she was getting married again in Canberra, and why didn't Diana come for a visit? Christopher was still living in Sydney, and she had nothing else to do, so she did. She cried for months. Actually, she cried for seven years, until she knew with absolute certainty that Tony would never come back to her.

Seven years after Tony left, he was stabbed to death in his kitchen in Norfolk. The story, spread over the tabloids for a year, was extraordinarily sordid. A middle-aged man who ran a local pub called the Poacher's Pocket had come over to the house with his twenty-year-old girlfriend to discuss buying Tony's Aston Martin. The three started drinking and became very drunk. Tony left the room to take a nap, and his two guests rooted around and found fifteen hundred pounds in a briefcase; when he returned and saw them with the money a fight ensued, and Tony was stabbed three times in the neck. The man and the girlfriend left him and went back to the pub, where she, topless and crusted all over with dried blood, danced in the pub's disco a wild "dance of death," as it was called in one of the papers. The following year, the pub owner admitted his guilt to the *News of the World*—"Sure I killed him. Diamond died from three stab wounds to the neck. And it wasn't the fairy queen who did it!"—but only after the charges against him and his girlfriend had been dropped, for lack of evidence.

Diana left Australia only once: to nurse Toddles in London as she was dying, in 1987. Diana had always run to Toddles when she was in trouble, and now Toddles needed her. She had no money, so Toddles paid her ten pounds a week. She resented working as a servant, and Toddles didn't make it easier. She was in pain, unable to go to the hairdresser to maintain her hair in its shade of blood-orange (almost the same color as her Mercedes), and a bout with gangrene had resulted in the amputation of both her legs, but under any circumstances she would have been a dreadful patient. A few days before Toddles died, Diana came into her room and found her weeping. She'd been thinking about their lives, she said: how she had always done everything to please their father and Diana had disobeyed him, and at the end of it he had loved Diana anyway and Diana had done what she wanted to do. She was envious. Diana thought about Toddles's house, her jewelry, her Mercedes, her title, her fifty-year marriage; and she thought about her own three failed marriages and countless failed investments and how she'd never had any money or a stable home and was living in Australia for no better reason than that a woman she knew had been getting married for the second time and invited her to the wedding, and she was amazed. "Diana," Toddles said, "of all of us, you were the luckiest."

It's time for Gery to sing now. She is at the microphone, where she belongs, at the 2003 Sydney Cabaret Convention, lit by a pink-filtered spotlight at a calculated angle. The back of the stage is draped in silver lamé, and Gery is wearing silver and black. Her lips are a smear of cherry, her eyelids periwinkle; she is nearly eighty now, but her hair is still valiantly blond. She will sing her standard combination tonight: a few jazz favorites; a Noël Coward number she's always loved, about antic Britons in the colonies; and some lonely ballads, too, though she will sing them in the only way she can, as comedy.



She has been preceded this evening by young performers who have sung dirty ditties and sentimental ballads with the electric-drill vibrato that she hates. She starts off with a couple of old songs that everybody knows—"I Get a Kick Out of You," "When in Rome." She forgets the words to her Noël Coward number and starts laughing and the audience laughs with her and she leans back against the piano, where her accompanist, Tony Magee, is beginning to panic. "Hello, darling, you're having a nice bastard of a night, aren't you?" she says. Then she tells the audience she's going to sing a jazz number they don't know, one she's been singing since she heard June Christy do it, back in 1948. Tony Magee starts playing soft chords, long and slow, the way she told him.

"Something cool," Gery sings, very quietly, as though she were talking, and her voice is smooth and low, like a Martini in a bath.

I'd like to order something cool.
It's so warm here in town;
The heat gets me down.
Yes I'd like something cool.
I don't ordinarily drink
With strangers—
I most usually drink alone.
But you were so awfully nice to ask me—
And I'm so terribly far from home.

The song is about a drunk woman alone in a bar, someone like Blanche DuBois in "A Streetcar Named Desire." A man buys her a drink and she tells him about her old life, a life she probably never had, when she was rich and pretty and a tall man loved her. Gery sings it without pity, in the Whitburn way, but despite herself there is something pleading in her voice. When she finishes, the audience is quiet for a moment, and then starts clapping madly; they give her a standing ovation—the first of the night. Afterward, people wait in a long line to meet her and ask for her autograph while the younger singers stand alone. "Thank you for making me cry tonight," one man says. For a few minutes, Gery feels as if she's in Kiev again, the night that Gagarin flew into space and she was better than Ella; but she's nearly eighty now and her knee is very painful and she's so wrought up and feverish and exhausted from the show that she tells Tony Magee to take her back to the hotel, quickly, quickly, or she'll start to cry. ♦

PRISM

1.

Who can say what the world is? The world
is in flux, therefore
unreadable, the winds shifting,
the great plates invisibly shifting and changing—

2.

Dirt. Fragments
of blistered rock. On which
the exposed heart constructs
a house, memory: the gardens
manageable, small in scale, the beds
damp at the sea's edge—

3.

As one takes in
an enemy, through these windows
one takes in
the world:

here is the kitchen, here the darkened study.

Meaning: I am master here.

4.

When you fall in love, my sister said,
it's like being struck by lightning.

She was speaking hopefully,
to draw the attention of the lightning.

I reminded her that she was repeating exactly
our mother's formula, which she and I

had discussed in childhood, because we both felt
that what we were looking at in the adults

were the effects not of lightning
but of the electric chair.

5.

Riddle:
Why was my mother happy?

Answer:
She married my father.

6.

"You girls," my mother said, "should marry
someone like your father."

That was one remark. Another was,
"There is no one like your father."

7.

From the pierced clouds, steady lines of silver.

Unlikely
yellow of the witch hazel, veins
of mercury that were the paths of the rivers—

Then the rain again, erasing
footprints in the damp earth.

An implied path, like
a map without a crossroads.

8.

The implication was, it was necessary to abandon
childhood. The word "marry" was a signal.
You could also treat it as aesthetic advice:
the voice of the child was tiresome,
it had no lower register.
The word was a code, mysterious, like the Rosetta
stone.
It was also a roadsign, a warning.
You could take a few things with you, like a dowry.
You could take the part of you that thought.
"Marry" meant you should keep that part quiet.

9.

A night in summer. Outside,
sounds of a summer storm. Then the sky
clearing.
In the window, constellations of summer.

I'm in a bed. This man and I,
we are suspended in the strange calm
sex often induces. Most sex induces.
Longing, what is that? Desire, what is that?

In the window, constellations of summer.
Once, I could name them.

10.

Abstracted
shapes, patterns.
The light of the mind. The cold, exacting
fires of disinterestedness, curiously

blocked by earth, coherent, glittering
in air and water,

the elaborate
signs that said *now plant, now harvest*—

I could name them, I had names for them:
two different things.

11.

Fabulous things, stars.

When I was a child, I suffered from insomnia.
Summer nights, my parents permitted me to sit
by the lake;
I took the dog for company.

Did I say "suffered"? That was my parents' way of
explaining
tastes that seemed to them
inexplicable: better "suffered" than "preferred to
live with the dog."

Darkness. Silence that annulled mortality.
The tethered boats rising and falling.
When the moon was full, I could sometimes read
the girls' names
painted to the sides of the boats:
Ruth Ann, Sweet Izzy, Peggy My Darling—

They were going nowhere, those girls.
There was nothing to be learned from them.

I spread my jacket in the damp sand,
the dog curled up beside me.
My parents couldn't see the life in my head;
when I wrote it down, they fixed the spelling.

Sounds of the lake. The soothing, inhuman
sounds of water lapping the dock, the dog
scuffling somewhere
in the weeds—

12.

The assignment was to fall in love.
The details were up to you.
The second part was
to include in the poem certain words,
words drawn from a specific text
on another subject altogether.

13.

Spring rain, then a night in summer.
A man's voice, then a woman's voice.

You grew up, you were struck by lightning.
When you opened your eyes, you were wired
forever to your true love.

It only happened once. Then you were taken care of,
your story was finished.

It happened once. Being struck was like being
vaccinated;
the rest of your life you were immune,
you were warm and dry.

Unless the shock wasn't deep enough.
Then you weren't vaccinated, you were
addicted.

14.

The assignment was to fall in love.
The author was female.
The ego had to be called the soul.

The action took place in the body.
Stars represented everything else: dreams, the
mind, etc.

The beloved was identified
with the self in a narcissistic projection.
The mind was a sub-plot. It went nattering on.

Time was experienced
less as narrative than ritual.
What was repeated had weight.

Certain endings were tragic, thus
acceptable.
Everything else was failure.

15.

Deceit. Lies. Embellishments we call
hypotheses—

There were too many roads, too many
versions.
There were too many roads, no one path—

And at the end?

16.

List the implications of "crossroads."

Answer: a story that will have a moral.

Give a counter example:

17.

The self ended and the world began.
They were of equal size,
commensurate,
one mirrored the other.

18.

The riddle was: why couldn't we live in the mind.

The answer was: the barrier of the earth
intervened.

19.

The room was quiet.
That is, the room was quiet, but the lovers were
breathing.

In the same way, the night was dark.
It was dark, but the stars shone.

The man in bed was one of several men
to whom I gave my heart. The gift of the self,
that is without limit.
Without limit, though it recurs.

The room was quiet. It was an absolute,
like the black night.

20.

A night in summer. Sounds of a summer storm.
The great plates invisibly shifting and changing—

And in the dark room, the lovers sleeping in each
other's arms.

We are, each of us, the one who wakens first,
who stirs first and sees, there in the first dawn,
the stranger.

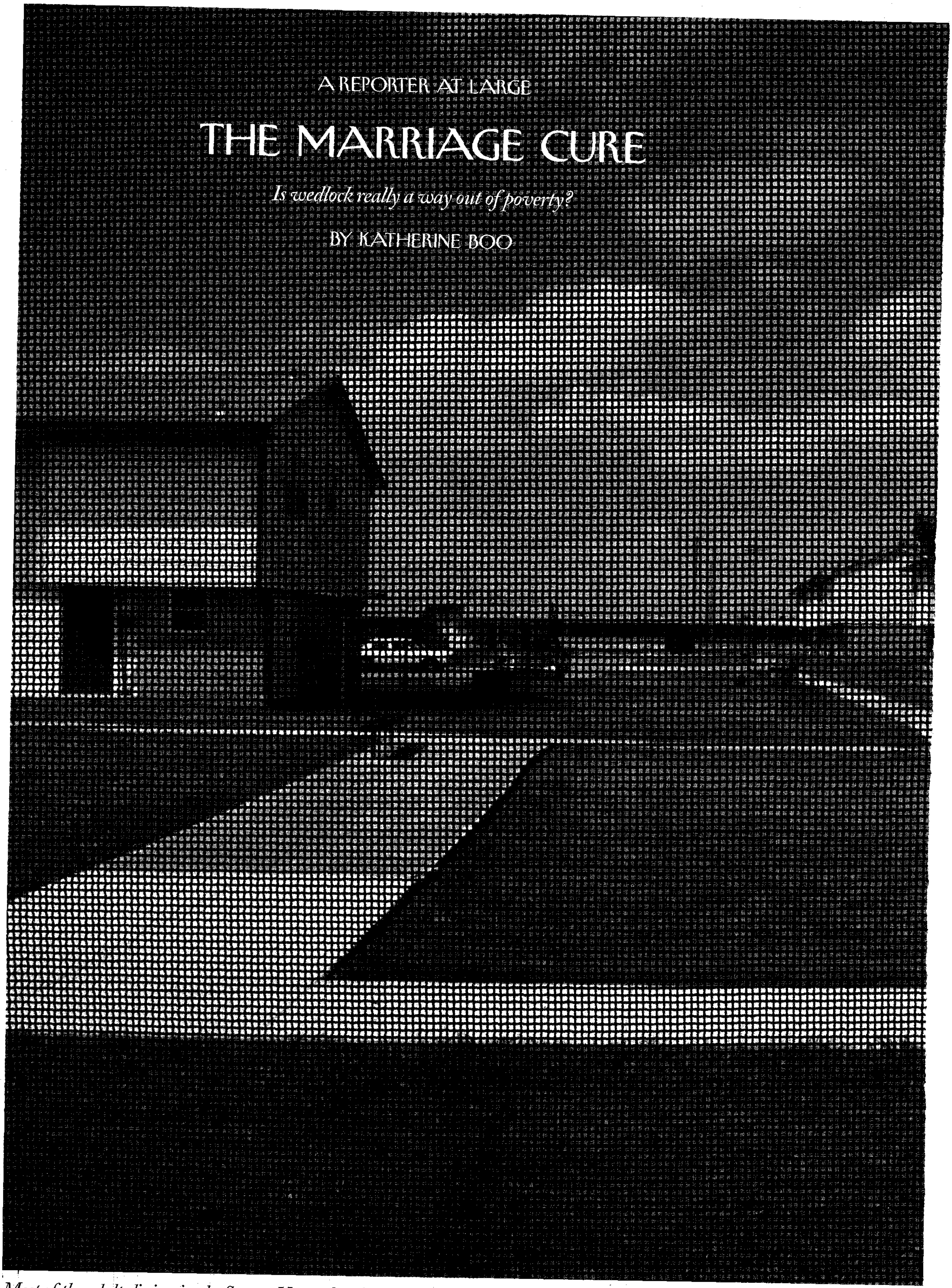
—*Louise Glück*

A REPORTER AT LARGE

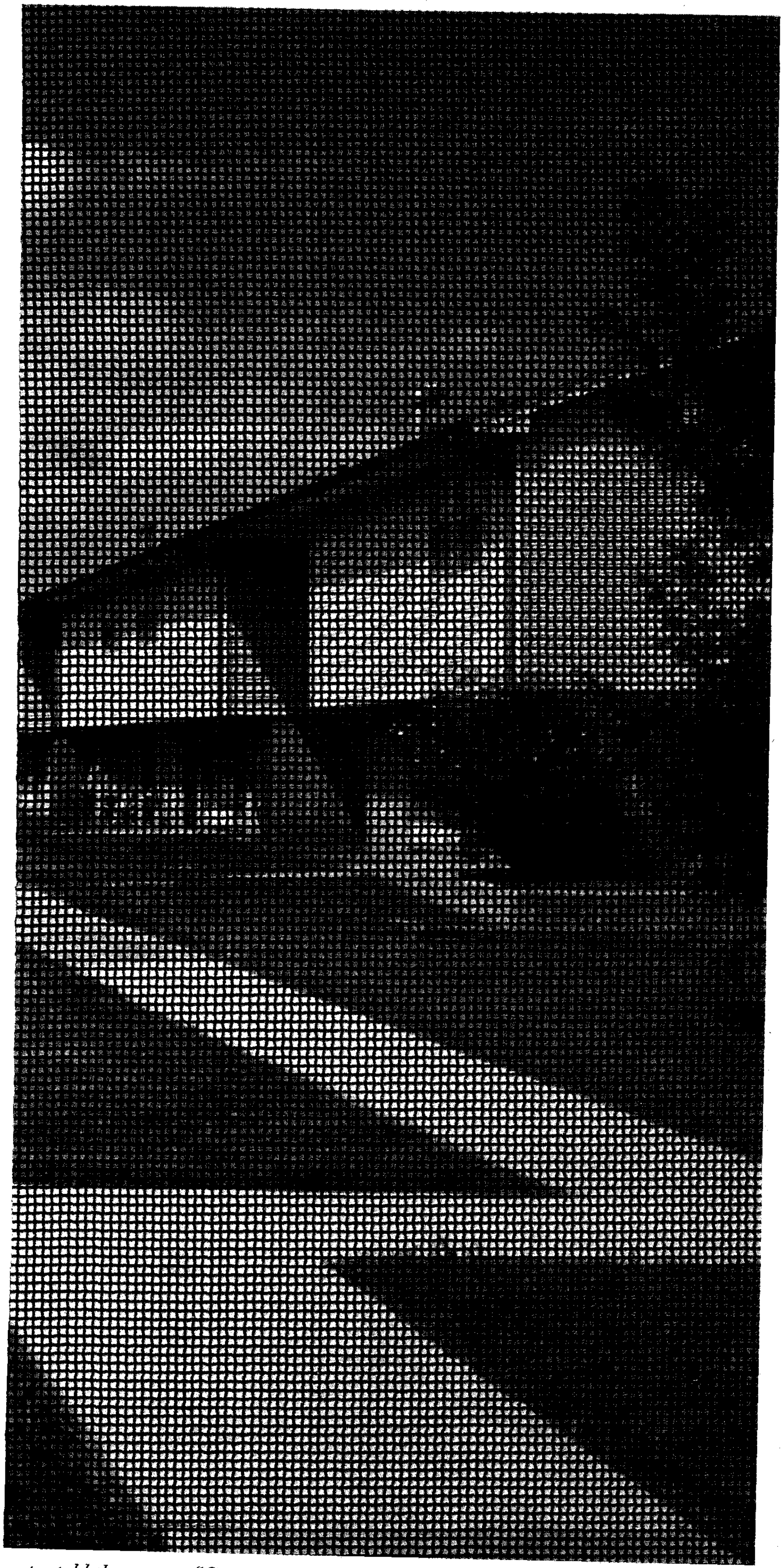
THE MARRIAGE CURE

Is wedlock really a way out of poverty?

BY KATHERINE BOO



Most of the adults living in the Sooner Haven housing project, in Oklahoma City, are female; one resident calls it "our cage." A marri



moter told the women, "Come learn about relationships!" Photographs by Gilles Peress.

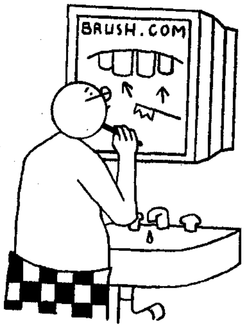
One July morning last year in Oklahoma City, in a public-housing project named Sooner Haven, twenty-two-year-old Kim Henderson pulled a pair of low-rider jeans over a high-rising gold lamé thong and declared herself ready for church. Her best friend in the project, Corean Brothers, was already in the parking lot, fanning away her hot flashes behind the wheel of a smoke-belching Dodge Shadow. "Car's raggedy, but it'll get us from pillar to post," Corean said when Kim climbed in. At Holy Temple Baptist Church, two miles down the road, the state of Oklahoma was offering the residents of Sooner Haven three days of instruction on how to get and stay married.

Kim marvelled that Corean, who is forty-nine, seemed to know what to wear on such occasions. The older woman's lacquered fingernails were the same shade as her lipstick, pants suit, nylons, and pumps, which also happened to be the color of the red clay dust that settled on Sooner Haven every summer. The dust stained the sidewalks and gathered in the interstices of a high iron security perimeter that enclosed the project's hundred and fifty modest houses.

This forbidding fence, and the fact that most of the adults inside it were female, sometimes prompted unkind comparisons with the old maximum-security women's prison five minutes up the road. But Kim and Corean believed that they could escape Sooner Haven, and so were only mildly irked by what one of their neighbors called "our cage." Besides, other low-income areas had fierce borderlines, too. The distance between Sooner Haven and Holy Temple Baptist Church edged the territories of the street gangs Hoover Crip, Grape Street Crip, and Rolling Twenties. Kim's brother had been murdered by a gang, but she couldn't keep track of their ever-mutating names, boundaries, and affiliations. And Corean had refused to learn, even when Hoover Crip members started shooting at one of her five children. It was Corean's contention that you could be in the ghetto and not of it. Ignoring the stunts of heavily armed neighbors kept your mind free for more enriching pursuits, such as the marriage class for which Corean had roused her young friend from bed this morning.

Oklahoma has rarely found itself in

the vanguard of antipoverty thinking, but the class to which the two women were heading embodies a vigorous new idea—something known locally, and archly, as "the marriage cure." Traditionally, singleness has been viewed as a symptom of poverty. Today, however, a politically heterodox cadre of academics is arguing that singleness—and, particularly, single parenthood—is one of poverty's primary causes, for which matrimony might be a plausible tonic. For the past few years, the state of Oklahoma has been converting this premise into policy. In an initiative praised by the Bush Administration, which aims to seed marriage-promotion programs nationwide, the state has deputized public-relations firms, community leaders, and preachers (among them the pastor at Holy Temple Baptist Church) to take matrimony's benefits to the people. Last summer, that marriage drive reached Sooner Haven. "Come learn about relationships!" said the recruiter who knocked on the housing project's beat-up doors.



Kim happened to be available for edification, having recently quit a job that she had found depressing: selling home-security systems over the phone. The script she'd had to memorize still banged around her brain. "What? You can't afford twenty-nine ninety-nine a month but can afford to run the risk of being robbed and losing everything you've worked hard for in life? Or, even worse, a family member? You say God will protect you, but maybe my call to you today is God's way of telling you that the world he created does possess an element of danger, and he wants you to be as safe as you can be. It is quite possible that God has a reason for my call to you today."

"Most of the people I called were old and scared already," Kim said, sighing. "I wasn't putting enough heart into my rebuttals."

Many of Kim's contemporaries are single mothers and thus eligible for welfare between jobs. But for Kim, who is unmarried, childless, and on a strict regime of Depo-Provera contraceptive injections, the decision to quit a job before lining up the next one had harsh repercussions. She was hungry, and hoped that marriage class would come with free lunch. In any event, it would give her respite from her unit at Sooner Haven, which, despite her liberal use of paper doilies, ceramic angels, and lavender-scented candles, was no longer a pleasant place to spend a day. The roof leaked, and an overnight storm had flooded her living room and kitchen. Still, food and sanctuary were not the extent of Kim's interest in marriage class. She had recently fallen, as she put it, "heart over heels" in love.

Kim has moist brown eyes, a body that neighborhood males call "ripe" and "aching for my love time," and a bleeding ulcer that an emergency-room doctor ascribes, not implausibly, to stress. It is her habit to think with a fist on her chin, and the puzzle that engrosses her is how to live a life less indigent and criminal than the one in which she was raised. The youngest of seven children, she was the first of her four sisters to forgo having babies as a teen-ager. She hoped as well to be the first to go to college, and had recently taken a series of tests for a general-equivalency diploma. Although she didn't know anyone from a background like hers who had obtained a college degree, she didn't see why a smart woman couldn't pull it off. For several years, she'd been trying to do the precise opposite of what people around her had done, in the hope of eventually attaining what she termed "a healthy, wealthy, normal-lady life." Marriage, like staying out of jail, struck her as a vital part of normal-lady living.

The man she'd chosen (although he had yet to be informed of his selection) was a tall, soft-spoken construction worker named Derrick, whom she had first spoken to at the International House of Pancakes. He was a graduate of a two-year college and had a one-year-old son "he actually does for." And, unlike her previous boyfriend, he didn't use or sell drugs.

Kim keeps the things that matter to her next to her mattress, in a cardboard box stamped "Fragile—Eggs." In addition to a handmade card that her father sent from prison on her eighteenth birthday, and a tangle of blond hair extensions that her mother had mailed when Kim turned twenty-two, the box held several poems that Kim had written about the meagreness of what people around her termed love. Many of the men she knew called their women "bitch" when their male friends came to visit, and they hit those women when the male friends went away. After sex, they wanted to leave, pretending not to hear when a girl offered to turn on the hot plate and make breakfast biscuits from scratch. "You know how they wrassle you down and it's wham wham wham, and then when they come they go, 'Say my name!'?" she asked. "It's all about their egos, and that's all I ever knew. But the first time I slept with Derrick he asked, 'Is this O.K., does this feel right?' And, after, I just burst out crying. Because when he held me I felt, this is it—this is the something I've been missing my whole life." Holding on to this something was a feat for which her life's experience had provided no strategy, and she hoped that the marriage class to which she was headed might suggest one.

Corean found it moving that, even among city girls like Kim, who had been nourished on rappers named Kingpin Skinny Pimp, Dirty, and Lord-knows-what-all, the word "love" retained the gentle, Barbara Cartland contours of her own Deep South girlhood. But Corean, who had separated from her husband twelve years ago, was not the romantic she had once been; she applauded Kim's optimism but didn't share it.

So why bother with a three-day seminar at a church whose ceiling, after asbestos removal, appeared to consist of the pelts of a thousand plush toys? Corean Brothers, so outwardly composed that her kids called her the Reverend Doctor Mom, was feeling a little wobbly. In the fall, the youngest of her five babies would enter his final year in high school, and while her grown children were regular, affectionate presences in her life, the cause to which she had devoted herself since her divorce no longer seemed to require her full-time vigilance. Corean had two sets of grandchildren, by her eldest son. But he frequently quarrelled with the mothers of the babies, and Corean saw her four grandchildren only intermittently.

She busied herself with what she called her "private ministry": visiting nursing-home residents and penitentiary inmates; helping Sooner Haven's younger women, Kim among them, with their monthly budgets or workplace disputes. Still, the days now contained enough hours for a reasonable woman to fret about her future.

Lately, besides the symptoms of menopause, a "burning kind of numbness" had been snaking up her arms. Ineligible for Medicaid and unable to afford private insurance, she improvised treatments, just as she'd improvised over the years to keep her children from noticing when a child-support payment didn't come. Her annual income was five thousand dollars, but, except for ten months when she and her husband first separated, she had not received welfare. "The child support was supposed to have covered us, but when it stopped coming I couldn't afford a lawyer," she said. "So I did what you do when you're a girl from the sticks—you just make do." Amid the four-o'clocks and marigolds in her flower bed, and in defiance of housing-authority rules, she had planted peppers and cantaloupe. She decorated her children's bedrooms with thrift-shop items and roadside salvage. With the castoffs of a woman whose house she cleaned, she sent each child to school sharply dressed.

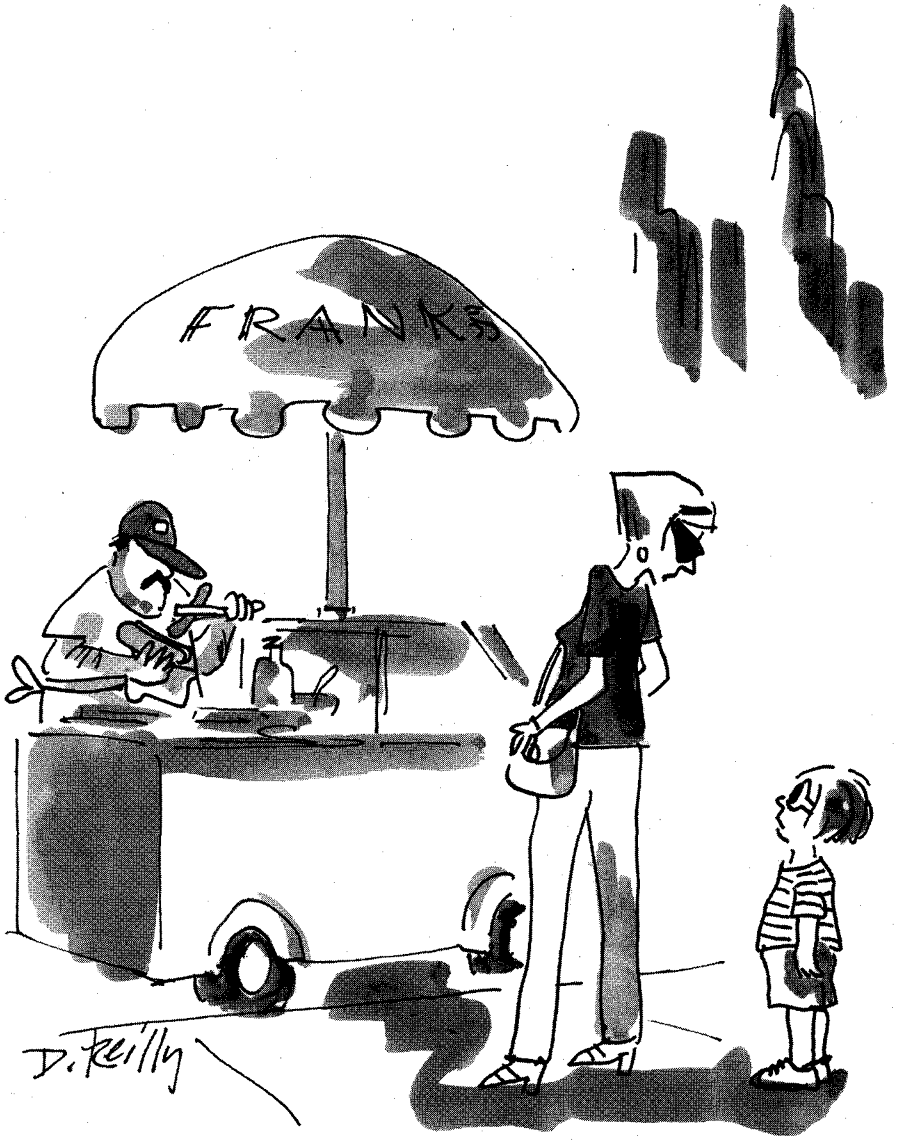
The standards of parenting at Sooner Haven are not uniformly exacting. One exasperated resident recently named her newborn De Las' One. But it was generally acknowledged in the complex that Corean Brothers had been blessed with mother wit. "I even found great pleasure in hard work," read a passage from Ecclesiastes which she had underlined and asterisked five times in the disintegrating Living Bible that now accompanied her to Holy Temple church. "The pleasure was, indeed, my only reward for all my labors."

Her husband had remarried six months after the divorce; Corean had had one second date in twelve years. Mornings now, she interrogated the mirror with new ruthlessness, curious about whether Preparation H could, as she'd heard, reduce the puffiness around one's eyes. If five children had altered her face for the worse, they had at least erased the evidence of her malnourished childhood as a Central Florida field hand. "You're ninety pounds with two bricks in your pockets," boys had teased her then. Now she was shaped like a Coke bottle, and Coke-colored, *too*—red and gold glints in dark-brown skin. Her cheekbones were still high, her eyes were alive with humor.

One unacknowledged consolation of struggling in the inner city is the lack of time one has to indulge romantic discontent. It was letting go of her children, more than losing her husband, that had caused the Reverend Doctor Mom to notice that she was alone.

Many Oklahoma City maps end where the Sooner Haven neighborhood begins. Pizza places won't deliver here, and local strip malls have been abandoned, their display windows given over to the leaflets of undercapitalized entrepreneurs ("Nile Princess Home Braidz 4 Less"). The neighborhood feels connected to the world around it mainly on Sunday mornings, when residents who have moved up and out return to its churches to pray. Nonetheless, the community is an apt setting for a test of whether the government can persuade low-income citizens to marry.

Using federal money to raise the marriage rate among the poor—the House recently approved a three-hundred-million-dollar White House plan to help states experiment toward this goal—is an effort to complete what the Administration considers the unfinished business of the 1996 federal welfare-reform law. And Oklahoma turns out to be a quintessential post-welfare state. In the



"He doesn't have wasabi, dear."

past eight years, its public-assistance rolls dropped ninety-one per cent—among the country's most substantial declines—but widespread work hasn't brought widespread economic security. Median household income remains among the lowest in the country, and out-of-wedlock childbearing rates are among the country's highest. While a considerable amount of social-science data suggest that two-parent families are good for children, marriage promoters also see matrimony as a means of decreasing crime and welfare dependence in neighborhoods like Sooner Haven. In a recent homage to Oklahoma's marriage-promotion pioneers, Wade Horn, the Bush Administration's marriage-promotion guru, wrote, "If marriage is good for communities, why should government be shy about promoting and strengthening it?"

The 2000 census recorded a decline in marriage rates across all demographic groups, but the least likely to marry are African-Americans, who are also increasingly overrepresented on national welfare rolls. As Orlando Patterson, of Harvard, a scholar of black marriage patterns, recently observed, African-Americans remain "among the most unpartnered and estranged individuals in the world."

Kim Henderson dreamed of a sunset wedding in a neighborhood park. Corean Brothers's fantasy was simpler still: she'd hire Oklahoma's fastest-talking preacher and hold matrimonial history's briefest reception, in order to get more swiftly to the honeymoon action. "It's been twelve years," she said, laughing. "I am a religious woman, but not a dead one." The two women were not especially concerned that their romantic ambitions could interest the government. Outsiders were always coming to Sooner Haven to sell opportunity, prying into the residents' business while doing so. Some of the people in the project believed that these help-brokers were counterfeit, that laws had been set in place to push blacks down while helping other minorities prosper. Over-the-clothesline conversation turned periodically to "the tax-free Asians"—North Vietnamese who, according to rumor, were welcomed to America (after fighting and killing black G.I.s) and exempted from income taxes, which explained how they came to own all those nail salons. Corean and Kim weren't certain about the Asians, but they did believe in the existence of opportunity for black people, somewhere. And it was as likely to be found at Holy Temple Baptist Church as anywhere else.

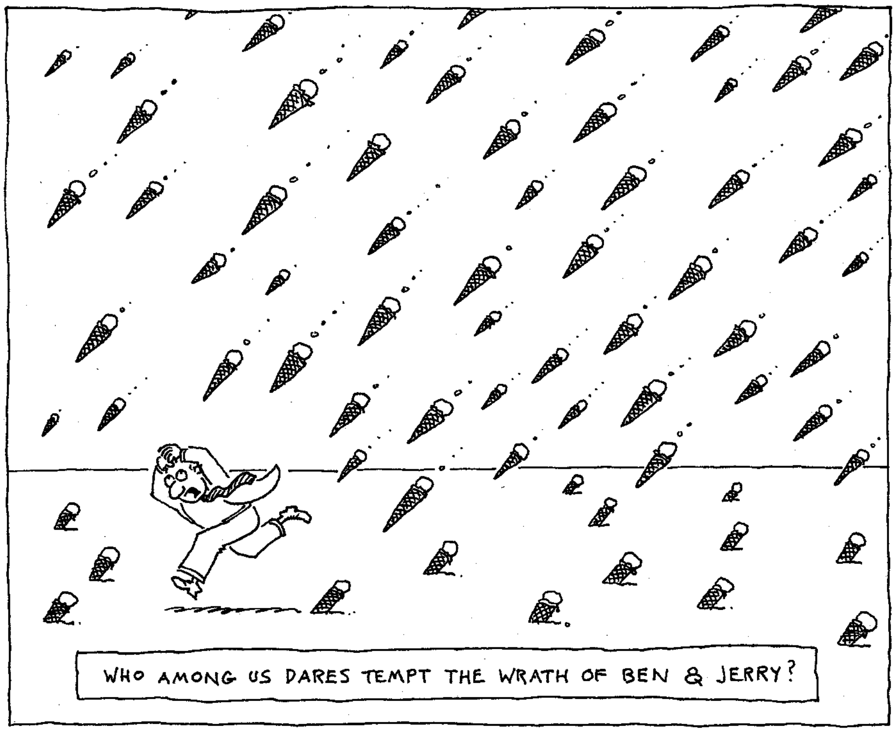
They arrived at marriage class thirty minutes late but were enthusiastically welcomed. Despite door-to-door solicitation in Sooner Haven and announcements in neighboring churches and social-service agencies, the total turnout was five, not counting the church secretary, a Sooner Haven single mother who, in a barely audible voice, described her divorce as "living death." Kim and Corean chose seats at the far end of a long Formica table, near the exit.

The government's evangelist, Pastor George E. Young, was tall, with a gleaming pate and a cell phone holstered to his khakis. When he folded his arms across his chest after making a point, the women giggled at his resemblance to Mr. Clean. "I am not naïve enough to think this class will stop you from having men over," he said as he distributed state-sponsored workbooks of what Oklahoma calls "empirically informed, empirically tested, regularly updated" information on how to make and keep a decent marriage. "What I am hoping is that, when the man does come over, you will have a different conversation."

The curriculum was rich with statistics and poll results, which Pastor Young displayed by overhead projector on a cracked cinder-block wall. What do couples fight about before marriage? (Money, jealousy, future in-laws.) What do couples fight about after marriage? (Money, communication, children, sex.) What percentage of married people feel unhappy in the relationship? (Most.) The data are bleak by design; the social scientists on whom Oklahoma relies believe that a crucial part of making and keeping a marriage is disabusing oneself of sentimental notions. Marriage is not sexual and emotional bliss between soul mates, they contend; it is a job requiring as much patience, self-sacrifice, and discipline as any other.

The students found the statistics depressing and the flowcharts in the workbooks unfathomable, but Pastor Young was neither of those things, and in three days of class only one student dozed off, briefly, following a Crock-Pot lunch. Christ built his church upon a rock, Young told the students; a marriage requires a similarly unyielding foundation. Value the ability to fight decently and nonviolently, he said, because, "believe me, there will be storms."

Hence, a pillar of the course was a



WHO AMONG US DARES TEMPT THE WRATH OF BEN & JERRY?

ZIEGLER

“speaker-listener” technique intended to promote calm, productive conflict resolution. To demonstrate, Young played a state-supplied video of couples working through the sort of conflicts that are seldom encountered in Sooner Haven. (Spouse hogs home computer. Spouse procrastinates about cleaning guest bedroom.) This cultural disconnect was perhaps predictable, as the curriculum used in Oklahoma was actually developed a quarter of a century ago for engaged or married couples. The curriculum's creators, the Colorado psychologists Scott Stanley and Howard Markman, say that their course encourages not just healthy marriages but individuals who are “less reliant on government services including welfare, health care, mental health care, and earning and saving more money.” However, testing of the approach has been conducted only minimally in inner-city settings. Marriage education in places like Sooner Haven is, like marriage itself, a venture in optimism.

“Look what we found yesterday when we were cleaning out the attic.”

“I'm not going to lie and say it's easy,” Pastor Young, who is in his second marriage, told the class. “So I know some of you will wonder whether it's worth it. But when you know how it feels to go home at night, to have them there every night, to have them trusting you, and to know you trust them back . . .” For a moment, he seemed to lose his place in the lesson plan. “To find that person and have that feeling—that is worth struggling toward, it's worth crying over. It is the worthiest of personal goals.”

From his counselling, Pastor Young has come to share the belief of many marriage-initiative advocates: that men more than women need convincing on this point. Thus he sees it as an unhappy but unavoidable fact that women are this social policy's beasts of burden. Having already complied with social and economic pressures to work, poor women were now being asked to do something that their government had so far failed at: push their male counterparts into the cultural and economic mainstream.

Kim and Corean found the couples squabbling on the videos “kind of petty” but enjoyed practicing the problem-solving techniques that the couples demonstrated. Pairing off for role-playing, the students learned to refrain from saying to a man who disappointed them, “You're an oily, two-timing toad,” and to say instead, “When you did *x*, in situation *y*, I felt *z*.” They practiced swallowing their rage, articulating their grievances specifically and respectfully, recognizing when a fight might turn violent, and listening with open minds to imaginary mates. Acting the part of a neglected wife and mother, Kim channelled her loneliness so convincingly that Pastor Young blinked back tears—an achievement that left Kim beaming.

“But in real life I'm still back at the beginning,” Kim said after the exercise. “I mean, how do you get to the point of even having a bad marriage, when every time you start to say the word ‘love’ he starts talking about basketball?”

“My thing is: how do you get a man to talk about marriage when you're pretty sure he's still sleeping with his baby's mother?” a nurse's aide asked, expressing a problem so familiar at Sooner Haven that it is known by the term “baby-mama drama.” “And then how do you tell if he wants to marry you for the right reasons?” the nurse's aide went on. “When I wear my white uniform, guys around here know I'm working and chase me down the street to get their hands on my paycheck.”

“You have to ask to be treated as you deserve,” Pastor Young said. “If you don't demand respect from the males, you won't get it.”

“Here's what troubles me,” Corean said, as another transparency lit up the wall. “Look at all those couples who say they're stable but not happy. I am enjoying these exercises, and I agree our society has too much divorce, but it doesn't seem right to me that a woman should stick with a man when she's miserable, or settle for one who doesn't make her happy. Why isn't it better to be alone?”

“Two parents means two paychecks,” Kim said, frowning. On a ledger, as a pooling of resources, marriage made sense. But Kim's experience with males, like that of the other women in the class, pointed toward a more complex calculation. None of the women were on welfare, and all were determined not to be. And while they wanted men for companionship, sex, and the sort of honest, intimate conversation they were enjoying in marriage class, they weren't entirely sure that men were useful to their efforts at self-improvement. All but one of the women in the room had grown up without a father in the home. At least two had been sexually abused in the first ten years of their lives. Those who had children had been left by the

"If you *must* know, I'm not West Point—I'm home-schooled."

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children's fathers. Three had been beaten by men they had loved, and two had been involved with violent criminals. In short, it required an imaginative leap to believe that a committed relationship with a man would rescue a woman from poverty. At Sooner Haven, relationships with men were often what stopped an ambitious woman from escaping.

As an urban preacher, Pastor Young grasped this paradox better than the developers of the curriculum he delivered, so he was not shattered when the first tangible result of his marriage instruction was the termination of what had been the most enduring relationship in the group. The nurse's aide, riding to the second day's class with Corean and Kim, passed her unemployed boyfriend's house and noticed another woman's car parked outside. Following an antic period of discovery, and with the encouragement of her classmates, the nurse sent the boyfriend of two years packing.

"Matthew 19:30 tells us the first will be last and the last will be first," Pastor Young said on the final day, as phone numbers were exchanged and sugar cookies were spirited into pocketbooks for later. "You think you are last now, you may be last in the eyes of the world, but if you only believe and live that you are worthy to be who you are, you will be first. You will eke out some respect and happiness from this life." He closed his Bible and sighed.

"I wish I could get more men into this room, instead of asking you all to go out and be the messengers for what a meaningful, committed relationship might be," he went on. "But for now it's up to you to go out and teach the men."

Waiting at the bus stop on a withering August afternoon, Kim Henderson shook the front of her white blouse, in the vain hope of keeping sweat stains at bay. She wanted to look nice, as she was bound for one of Oklahoma City's upmarket shopping malls. After her retirement from burglar-alarm telemarketing, she had papered the mall's boutiques with job applications. But while she attended marriage class her phone was cut off, owing to an outstanding fifty-nine-dollar bill. Since there was now no way for prospective employers to reach her, and since she had no money to buy toilet paper, let alone pay her phone bill, she had decided to take a bus to the mall and go from shop to shop, asking if anyone had tried to call her about a job.

The mall was a long ride from Sooner Haven. Derrick owned a Pontiac Grand Am that he might have let her use, but Kim hadn't seen or heard from him in ten days. She thought he might be working at a construction site outside Oklahoma City, or might be preoccupied with his baby son. "Derrick's a good person," she said determinedly. "And just because I'm not sure of the reason doesn't mean he doesn't have one."

When a bus turned down her street, she stepped off the curb, but the bus did not slow down. Half an hour later, a second bus cruised by her outstretched, dollar-waving hand. It is an unhappy fact of Oklahoma City life that bus drivers bypass would-be riders in very poor neighborhoods, and blacks in less poor ones. Kim's grandmother, who had died the previous year, bequeathed Kim an aged blue Oldsmobile. But Kim had passed the car on to her mother, who lives in Arkansas. "She's sixty and had to walk all this way to the school cafeteria where her job is at," Kim explained. Recently, several of her girlfriends had applied to a program at the Oklahoma City human-services office, which gave them five hundred dollars to get a car for work. Her friends are eligible for such aid because they are single mothers. Childless Kim must rely on buses.

Kim has tried to develop constructive ways of venting her frustration. She had kept a journal until a relative discovered it and passed it around. She tried to talk into an imaginary tape recorder, but that made her feel crazy. Lately, she had settled on the "weird but hopefully less pathetic" technique of translating her anxieties and hopes into unmetered, bluesy song. "Help may not come just when I want it to," she sang to the street, "but when it comes it might not be too late."

After an hour, a bus pulled over. It took her to the center-city bus depot, which is situated in front of the county jail. Waiting for a transfer bus under a billboard for Crawley 24-Hour Bail Bonds, Kim was propositioned by a man wheeling a baby carriage and smoking a Black & Mild cigar. Kim cut him off in mid-fantasy. "Don't you know me? I'm Frank's daughter, which makes you my cousin. And you know Frank would kill you for this."

The cousin with the carriage peeled away, and another suitor stepped forward. When she told the new guy that she had a boyfriend, he laughed, and said, "Well, then, he must not love you, honey, if he be making you take the damn bus."

"Like flies to apple pies," Corean liked to say of Kim's ability to attract male interest, but Kim's options usually fell short of marriage-class standards. This was a hitch in the uplift-by-marriage method which even Pastor Young understood. "Kim wants to get out of her situation by working, going to school, maybe getting married," he said once, when Kim was out of earshot. "But she lives in an isolated neighborhood where most of the males have abandoned hope in schools, legit jobs, the system. The way they tell it to me, they see three ways to get out of the ghetto: through professional sports, through rapping, and through crime." Half of Oklahoma's black men are out of the labor force, according to the 2000 census. In the neighborhoods around Sooner Haven, the figure is higher still.

An older man in an orange jumpsuit was now standing before Kim, balancing a broom on his shoulder. "Now, for my part, I believe you have a beautiful face and a nice body," he said. "Are you over eighteen? I'll be getting out of the halfway house in several months and I'd like to buy you a steak."

Kim sometimes laughed about being a "creep magnet," but Derrick's unexplained absence had lately sapped her humor. Her father had repeatedly pulled vanishing acts, too—into drink and into prison. For most of her life, Kim's mother had compensated, watching her little girl's back as best she could, but two years ago her mother left Oklahoma City to work in Arkansas.

Before Kim adopted her normal-lady plan, she had had a crew of girlfriends with whom she could share her thoughts on love and men. When the connecting bus arrived at the center-city depot, one of them—Amanda—was on it. Amanda's T-shirt said, in large type, "I promise to be a good girl," and, in small type, "if you promise to be a bad boy." Seeing Kim, she reached into a tight back pocket and produced a photograph of a newborn. "Ashley—I had her six weeks ago Saturday."

Kim's eyes darted to her friend's flat belly. "I know," Amanda said proudly, "I didn't gain any weight with her at all. Now, get this: When my time came, I was seven centimetres dilated and didn't have nobody with me, and still they kicked me out of St. Anthony Hospital, because they claimed my Medicaid card didn't clear. I had to go clear across the city to Mercy hospital by myself—dag, I thought I would never make it. Funny, my Medicaid card cleared there."

Kim wants to have two children, but only when she's married and has financial stability. This plan struck some of her acquaintances as foolish; they thought only white women waited until they were too old to keep up with a toddler. Kim believed that, at twenty-two, she still had time. But in lonely stretches like this one her hunger for the companionship of a baby grew so acute that she borrowed acquaintances' children, took them to Wal-Mart, and had photographs taken of them in her arms.

"Now my new boyfriend wants me to have his baby, too," Amanda was saying when the bus pulled into Penn Square Mall.

The manager of a store that sells jelly beans in ninety-nine flavors said, "Kim Henderson—yes, I remember your name. You had a good application, but we couldn't get through on the phone, so we hired someone else."

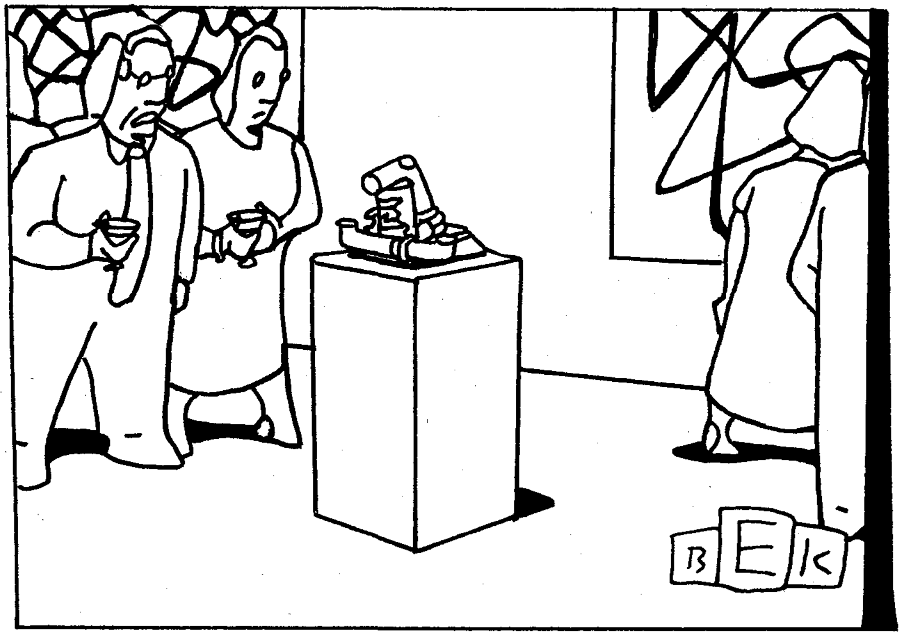
If we had wanted an interview, the managers at Trendz and American Eagle and nine other stores said, we would have called you.

"But after I left my application my phone got cut off. That's why I came today. I was an assistant manager at Subway."

If we decide we want you, the managers said, we'll call you.

The mall smelled of cinnamon buns, reminding Kim that she hadn't eaten. At one store, she reached for the manager's hand and begged, "The person who comes all this way just to see if you've called, that's a person who is going to work her behind off for you when you hire her." She then learned that the job required her to work until 9 P.M. There is no regular bus service to Sooner Haven or its environs after dark.

"I feel like an ant," Kim said, leaving the fourteenth store. "A little nothing that bus drivers and supervisors can't see." A ten-dollar bill fell from the purse of a middle-aged shopper walking ahead of her. Kim scooped it up and returned it to the woman, lowering her lashes to hide the fact that her eyes had filled with tears. "If I don't get a job soon, I don't know what I'll do." Kim broke down outside a boutique called



"It's found crap."

the Buckle, which sells sun hats and turquoise-encrusted belts. On her earlier visit, she had steered clear of the store, along with J. Crew, because she thought that her clothes might be too ghetto. Blowing her nose, she glanced inside. "Maybe if I pretend that I did apply there, and the staff thinks they lost my application, they'll be nice to me."

Kim Henderson wants to work, go to college, get married, and have children—to have "a healthy, wealthy, normal-lady life."

MAGNUM

The gambit worked. A supervisor couldn't find Kim's name in a loose-leaf binder of rejected applications, gave Kim two minutes to summarize her qualifications, and then scheduled a phone interview with the manager for that night at eight o'clock. Kim recited Corean's number. When she returned to the bus stop outside the mall, the heat still blasted, but she bounced on and off the curbside like an overwound toy. "The ant has an interview!" she sang.

A slim white woman emerged from Dillard's department store with four shopping bags, a Burberry satchel, and, dangling from her wrist, a silver peace-sign charm. Kim suddenly grew still. "I'd like to be elegant someday, too," she said quietly. "But if I ever did get a healthy, wealthy life, I wonder if my children would grow up looking down at people like me."

When a bus that would have taken her home accelerated past, Kim practiced answers to potential interview questions: "I have a genuine interest in fashion and have been working a cash register since I was fourteen." When the next bus cruised by, she tried a trick that she'd recently invented to manage depression, recalling in detail the happiest days of her life. "Here's one I like—my mom's birthday, in April, 1990. We had nothing to eat, we were suffering at the time, and the thing to know about my mom is that the only pleasure she ever really had in life was bingo—Lucky Star Casino, Will Rogers Bingo Hall, she played everywhere, and sometimes took me along to play a card, too. One of those places had a special deal for regulars—you play free on every Wednesday in the month of your birthday. She went out, and when she came back we were going to bed. She rustled us up and told us to open the door. She'd played U-Pick-Em and won twenty-five hundred dollars in cash and a big old stereo, which was sitting there outside. All eight of us busted out crying. Back then, we thought a hundred dollars was everything, so with twenty-five hundred dollars we could hardly imagine it, we thought we were millionaires. I got a pink-and-blue winter parka, and jeans from the old Fifty-Percent-Off Store. Mom bought some serious groceries and then gave us each ten dollars to spend however we wanted. I went to the 7-Eleven and bought Good & Plenty."

Another bus was coming through the shopping plaza. Kim stepped forward, signalling furiously. When it swerved around her, she sank to the curb. The bus was not only the seventh one to pass her that day; it was the last bus to Sooner Haven until morning. In terms of landmass, Oklahoma City is the third-largest metropolis in America, and she was a five-hour walk from home.

A pretty woman in a tear-and-sweat-soaked blouse will eventually be noticed by somebody. A Chevy Impala pulled over, driven by a black woman not much older than Kim. "I know, I used to have to take the bus, too," said the driver, who, as it turned out, was an assistant supervisor at a gift store in the mall. "I'll drive you home." She went past the alabaster state capitol and into the northeast quadrant, where Sooner Haven is situated, and where TV crews were covering a shooting from the parking lot of a carryout called Leo's BBQ. "It as bad as they say around here?" the woman asked Kim when they reached the project's gates.

"If you go outside and try to be known, you're going to have trouble," said Kim, her optimism not yet flattened by the Buckle manager, who would not keep her appointment. "But if you live all low and invisible you'll more than likely be O.K."

One fall morning, Corean accompanied her youngest son, Fella, who is eighteen, to parent-teacher day at his magnet school. Fella, suffering from a football injury, limped along in a knee brace. Even so, he could outpace a mother in toe-strangling second-hand shoes. A few paces behind her son, Corean watched a group of lithe classmates embrace him, fretting over his readiness for next week's game. Corean is the rare mother of an Oklahoma high-school footballer who doesn't know what position her boy plays. But in a drawer by her bed she has every standardized-test score he's brought home since preschool.

Corean Brothers with Fella, the youngest of her five children, who she hoped would get a first-rate college education.

When Corean reached the school entrance, the girls had dispersed, and her son, looking stricken, was being marched down the hall by an apple-cheeked teacher. "Who-o-o-o," the teacher called out, "is the mother of this spectacular child?"

Other mothers turned to look as the instructor caught Corean in an armlock. "I have been waiting to meet you, Mrs. Brothers. I love your kid, and the smarts aren't the half of it. You've raised one way-cool human being."

A pleasure to teach, a treasure to know: in every classroom Corean entered, she received happy news about her son. Alerted to forthcoming assignments on Gilgamesh and "Silas Marner," clutching a quiz marked 97, Corean retreated as soon as politeness allowed. She was still not entirely at home in school. Her father, an epileptic and an alcoholic, had disappeared when she was six, abandoning a wife and ten children in a Florida shanty without electricity or running water. When she was in seventh grade, her mother had the first of a series of strokes. A year later, Corean quit school and became, at fourteen, a laborer in orange groves and snap-bean fields. In those days, she ate so much red dirt and Argo starch that she acquired a taste for them. (She came to tolerate fatback pork, too, but not the consequent tapeworms that dangled pinkly from one's nose.) She had failed to fulfill one promise she made to herself then—that her own children would be spared the experience of poverty. But she saw to it that each received the education that she had pined for.

Once, Fella was mistaken for a gangbanger, and his blue bandanna for a cocky display of Crip colors. Such underestimations crushed Corean; they just made Fella work harder at his calculus. Intent on being a doctor, he was stricter with himself than his teachers tended to be—an independence that Corean generally admired. But, returning home to Sooner Haven from parent-teacher day, she felt a shadow slip across her sense of satisfaction. Did a boy become self-reliant because the people who could have helped him didn't?

Fella was an A student at a good math-and-science high school, and a state champion in church oratory. Corean had hoped that his achievement would bring him scholarships and a first-rate college education. But as Pastor Young, a former high-school basketball player, observed from his pulpit, colleges recruit inner-city boys with athletic talent, not inner-city boys with good grades. (The vast majority of black students at selective colleges are from middle- or upper-class families.) Fella wasn't big enough to be a serious college football player. "It's fun, I like it," he said. "But the human brain, the science of it—that's what amazes me." He was already a third of his way through his senior year, however, and had yet to be advised about college by overworked guidance counsellors, whose numbers had been reduced by a state budget crisis. "I don't know about any colleges, really," Fella said, "though if I don't get scholarships I can't blame anyone but me. They say the money's out there. I just can't say for sure where it is."

When her older children were finishing high school, Corean had sensed a similar lack of official attention to their futures, and knew less than Fella about how to counter it. Those children were now employed and independent, and, except for the oldest—her rebel son, who held down two jobs as a nursing-home aide—were strong in the church. But Shandy, twenty, who is a receptionist and writes plays in her free time, had recently dropped out of community college, unable, on her salary, to cover the tuition. Dana, twenty-five years old and very bright, had managed to get an associate's degree at Oklahoma State University and now worked the desk at a local Hertz Rent-A-Car. When Corean fell behind on her phone or electricity bills, Dana would be at her door, waving a check. But Dana's plan of saving enough money to complete her B.A. and go to law school seemed to be perpetually deferred. The help that her children needed now, to become the people Corean believed they might be, seemed beyond the ken of a low-income, eighth-grade-dropout single mother.

When she was eighteen, Corean left fruit-picking for the Job Corps, a Great Society program for the poor which had an opening in Oklahoma City. She became a certified nurse's aide. She also met a funny, conscientious man who worked on a loading dock. She did what the Holy Temple pastor was now recommending, and married. Over the years, she emptied bedpans in a nursing home and cleaned houses for the affluent, but her earnings—forty-five dollars a day for housekeeping—didn't cover day-care costs. Eventually, she became a stay-at-home mother. Then her husband, who had become a truck driver for Frito-Lay, declared bankruptcy. "Financially, he was struggling, and with the kids I could only take day work," Corean said. "He was angry at me for not pulling my weight, income-wise, while I believed the kids needed me at home. The fights just tore us apart."

Occasionally, for memory's sake, she drives by a brick house on an elm-lined street three miles from Sooner Haven, where her family spent its happiest years. A basketball hoop rises from a square of concrete in the back yard, and lace curtains hang in the window of the bedroom where, one night, her husband beat her. "Black as I am," she remembered, "I was blue."

When she cleaned houses in one of Oklahoma City's better neighborhoods, Corean had studied the ways that rich women argued with their husbands—how they had raised their eyebrows and their voices instead of their fists. After the beating, she told her husband to leave. "I still loved him, and once I secured my physical safety I hoped we could work through the anger, try to talk about reconciliation," she said. But almost as soon as her husband left he began dating. "At the divorce hearing, the judge said to me, 'You didn't bother

W.M. Hamilton

"Will you please stop trying to appear larger than life?"

to get a lawyer?' But I had five kids, aged four to fifteen, and I had four hundred dollars in rent, and food and water and electricity and the phone and whatnot. My husband did have a lawyer, a good one, so what happened happened, and off I went to Sooner Haven, where my kids, who love their father, were angry at me for a very long time."

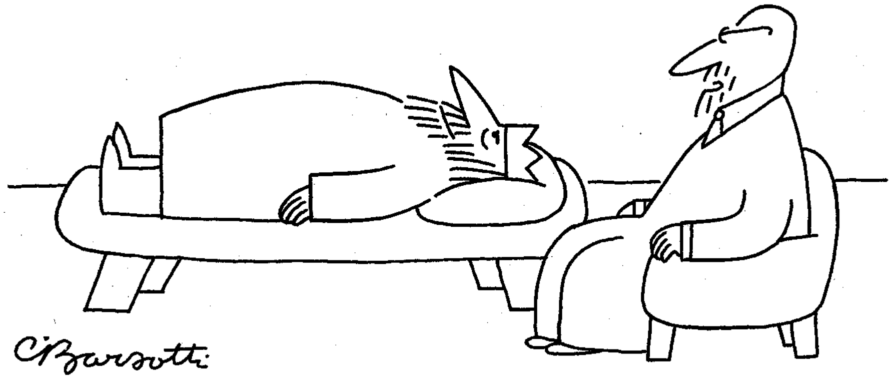
In those days, the Sooner Haven duplex was crowded. Now, with the older kids gone and Fella staying late for football practice every weekday, it felt unnervingly roomy. Corean was pleased when Dana came by after work. Over dinner, they discussed a college classmate of Dana's who had announced her engagement, then they turned to Corean's dating prospects. As she had little discretionary income, Corean's most regular outings were walks she took in a nearby city park. On one of those walks, she had struck up a conversation with an educated man who owned a lawn-care business. But he seemed to lose interest when he picked her up several days later for a dinner date. "I think he was shook up when he realized I lived in the projects," she said. Still, it was a date, something she'd never got from the singles gatherings she'd attended at her church for a decade. Often, not one male was in attendance.

"There's a short supply, no question," Dana said, "and a shorter supply for women who aren't going to let the man be the master, shut their mouths, and do what he tells them to do. But I'm not going to settle. I do believe that somewhere in this great big world God has someone in mind for me, someone wonderful who won't cheat on me. But, in the meantime, I've got plans for my life. If he's not bringing anything to the table, then he's just bringing me down." Her voice grew teasing. "But you, Reverend Doctor, you're getting old. You gotta get on it, make your *moo-oove*."

"Well, it used to be all I had to say was 'Five kids' and most men would turn tail and run," Corean replied. "But now I'm exploring my options, don't you worry." She looked down at her hands. "But even when you do find a man it's still a game of chance. I thought I was being careful the first time, but that didn't protect me from getting hurt."

Later that night, Corean shut off all the lights in the house except the one she needed to fold the laundry she'd taken in from her clothesline. In fact, she did know a decent man who wanted to marry her. He had given her a papier-mâché jewelry box and a ceramic rhinoceros, which sat on her dresser, but there was a reason she hadn't mentioned him to Dana.

Corean believed in maintaining appearances. "People may be looking for an excuse to write you off," she'd warned her children. "Don't give them the curse words or dirty clothes to help them do it." Corean knew exactly how those children would react when they learned that the Reverend Doctor Mom, while doing charity work at a faraway prison, had had her head turned by a three-time felon.



"Well, you certainly solved your little Oedipus problem since I saw you last."

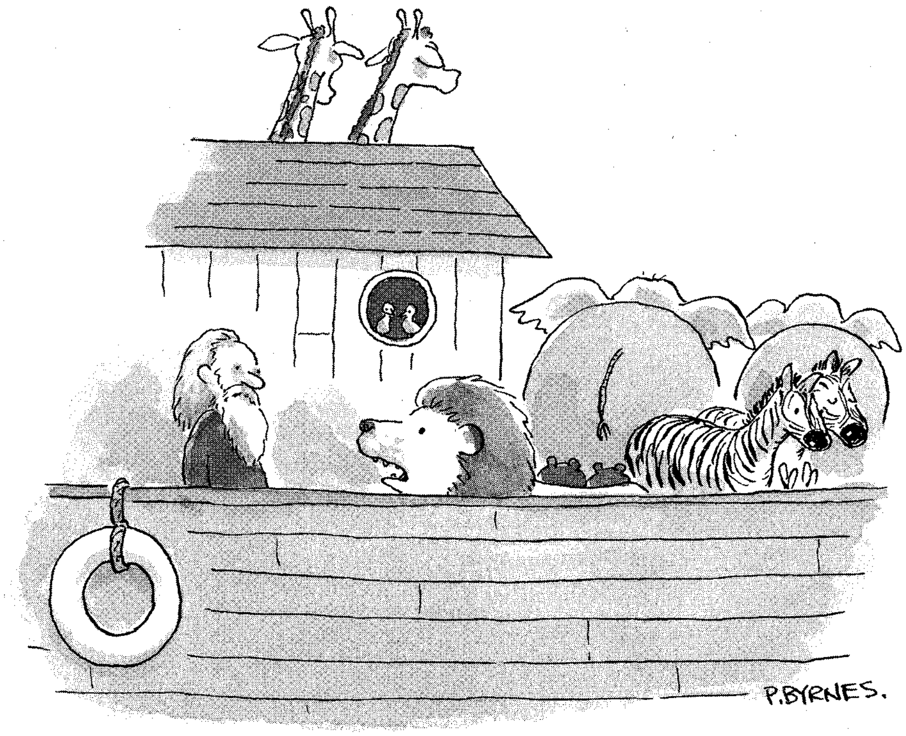
"Have my eyebrows grown out too scrungy?" Kim asked Derrick, as she dressed for work one autumn morning. Derrick placed his water glass on the cardboard box marked "Fragile—Eggs" and stared into her heart-shaped face. "They don't look so rough," he concluded after a moment. Kim exhaled; brow waxing and other vanities were not in her monthly budget.

Kim had recently obtained another telemarketing gig, a job whose chief requisite was the ability to absorb a gale force of customer hostility and whose chief benefit, by Kim's lights, was that she could get to it without taking the bus. Instead, every weekday, a colleague named Tiphani dropped her newborn at day care near Sooner Haven and then picked up Kim. In a cavernous warehouse in the northwest section of the city, they worked the phones from 3 P.M. to 11 P.M., after which Tiphani drove Kim home.

Kim's task was to persuade people in California and Ohio and New York to switch their local phone service to A. T. & T. She was not actually employed by A. T. & T. Her employer was an A. T. & T. subcontractor that paid two hundred dollars a week to start. But Tiphani said that after they memorized A. T. & T.'s catalogue of products—call waiting, call forwarding, and so on—they'd have an edge on other people who wanted a job at the bona-fide A. T. & T. In the meantime, Kim found the work preferable to frightening old people into buying home security, and preferable as well to the offer that she'd received recently, while walking down the street, "to play pool and do adult activities" under the auspices of a neighborhood fixture called Da Pimp.

Some women Kim knew posed for pornographers, or slept with men in exchange for money, clothes, and diapers. But the run-in with Da Pimp reminded Kim of why escaping the city's underworld was worth a stress ulcer. She had grown up around gangbangers, warrant dodgers, and woman beaters. "When I was young, I loved school so much I cried when I couldn't go on weekends," she said. "School, and not my crazy home, was the only place I could find peace."

But in the legit world Kim kept botching things. In the six weeks between leaving her burglar-alarm job and taking the new one, she had applied for emergency food stamps and been denied. Corean eventually accompanied her to the welfare office and pleaded her case,



"You need two more gazelles."

• •

successfully, but in the meantime Kim bounced several checks to Wal-Mart. Oklahoma penalties for bad checks are stiff, and are a politically popular income-generator for the District Attorney's office. For writing a twelve-dollar-and-eighteen-cent check, she now faced a hundred-and-fourteen-dollar penalty, including "victim restitution" to Wal-Mart and a fee to the D.A. And then there were two more bounced checks, and, as the letter from the D.A. said, if she didn't come up with four hundred and ninety-five dollars and fifty-three cents in ten days she could face a year-long jail sentence.

Corean pointed out that the District Attorney's wife, a plastic surgeon and former Miss Oklahoma, had just pleaded guilty to illegally obtaining narcotics, for which she received community service and permission to resume doing nose jobs. But Kim, who had seen her own father and brother face less forbearing jurists, did not anticipate lenient treatment.

Kim was guzzling Hawaiian Punch to soothe her ulcer, but at least Derrick had reappeared. Back in the summer, she suspected that he was keeping her from his friends and family. Now he introduced her warmly, saying, "This ain't my girl. This is my woman." He came over with candles when her gas and electricity were cut off. And when his toddler son took his first steps they were toward Kim.

Corean worried about how hard Kim was falling. "Maybe you don't get the love you need from your family, then you grow up and go out all desperate to find it," she said. "And if and when you don't find the right thing you try to tell yourself the wrong thing is right." But Kim was mindful of Pastor Young's advice—"It's up to you to go out and teach the men"—and she began to express her wish for commitment. "I don't want to pressure you," she said to Derrick, "but I care about you so much and feel serious about this relationship."

"I know, baby," he invariably replied, but she didn't know what to do next to nudge things closer to a sunset wedding. The problem-solving techniques that she'd learned in marriage class did, however, help her to learn more about her would-be husband. Using the "When you do *x*, I feel *y*" technique in order to convey her frustration at his failure to help her resolve her problem with the courts and the world's largest retailer, she learned that his construction job paid two hundred and fifty dollars a week, and that he didn't think often about marriage. He thought more about how to pay for his son's food and diapers while avoiding the repossession of his Grand Am, which he'd bought before he lost a job as a supervisor at Coca-Cola, and which was crucial to keeping his new, less remunerative job, "building houses in the middle of nowhere."

As Kim made the bed and prepared to leave for work, Derrick peered into her freezer. A bag of lima beans hung limply from a shelf. He closed the door and gave Kim a gentle goodbye kiss. From her screen door, Kim watched him climb into the Grand Am, crank the radio louder than befitted the partner of a healthy-wealthy woman, and wheel through Sooner Haven's gates.

She checked her watch. Tiphani should have arrived by now to take her to work, but the only cars in the parking lot were a Cutlass Supreme, whose vinyl top appeared to be suffering from multiple stab wounds, and a wheelless Toyota bearing the bumper sticker "Americans Kick Ass."

For Kim, given the bad-check problem, losing a day's pay would be financially disastrous. She tried to focus on a giveaway magazine called *American Baby*, which contained an article she loved: "They say here the five most important values to give your children are trust, patience, respect, empathy—is that how you pronounce it? And then the last one, self-reliance. That's the one where you teach your child that he can't depend on hardly anyone for anything, because in the end they're probably going to let you down."

Suddenly, Tiphani hollered from the parking lot, and *American Baby* hit the floor. Kim bolted out of her rusted screen door, the most eager cold-caller in the city.

The visiting room at Great Plains Correctional Facility holds six plastic chairs, a wall painting of a leafy lane (prisoners pose for snapshots in front of it), and a slew of posted rules that remind Corean of the ones she enforced in her own home when her kids were adolescents. "Only handholding is allowed!" the signs say. "Any other form of contact and your visit will be terminated."

Great Plains sits on the prairie an hour's drive west of Oklahoma City, a journey that provided a workout for Corean's Dodge Shadow. But the family of Steven Bruner, the inmate whom Corean was now visiting, lived even farther away. Five years ago, they'd asked Corean, a family friend, to check on him when they couldn't. Since then, her car had occasionally given up before it reached the facility, and more than once she had felt unwelcome in the white, working-class towns surrounding Great Plains. Still, on the nights before her visits, she would catch herself spreading skirts on her bed, wondering whether Steven would prefer the leopard-print or the pink one with pleats.

In northeast Oklahoma City, the question "Where he away at?" is widely understood to mean, In what prison is he serving time? Nearly one in ten black men is a prison inmate—one of the highest incarceration rates in the country. Steven, who started his criminal career at fifteen, had passed most of his adult life behind bars. Now he was thirty-eight, with maximum-security forearms and a broader range of reading interests than most other men Corean knew. Since his first imprisonment, educational and vocational programs for prisoners had been drastically curtailed, but he had availed himself of what remained, learning to inlay carpets with animal faces and craft ceramic knickknacks. He visited the library three times a week, the maximum permitted. And, three years after Corean first began talking to him about her faith, he became, to her delight, a Christian.

Corean struggled to explain even to herself how a bleak room separated from the outside world by three layers of razor wire, two sturdy gates, motion detectors, and a phalanx of armed guards (one of them assigned to sit beside her and Steven) had become a place where she could relax. Steven couldn't help get Fella into college. He couldn't even hold her. Their conversations, given the presence of the guard, were often self-conscious and sometimes, given the limited range of events in their respective lives, outright boring. Still, Steven listened with unwearied attention, a luxury Corean hadn't known since her divorce: "Well, Steven, the mechanic looked at the car and did the fan with some black tape, but when he fixed the brakes he didn't bleed them, so they still pump all the way down to the floor. I'll take it in when I have some change in my pocket. Anyway, I did try to fix the radio myself, took a pair of tweezers . . ."

"You don't have to take it in to get the brakes fixed. When you go home, get yourself some brake fluid at the auto-parts store, open the engine, and put it in the big round mouth."

"There's a lot of round things in that motor, you know darn well."

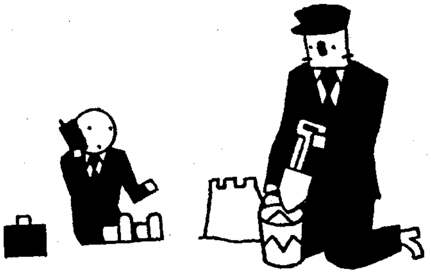
"There's a little screw on the side, and it's connected to the square—look, take a photo of the engine, send it to me, and I'll show you what's what. You'll see, it ain't hard."

Corean stretched her legs, letting her foot graze the instep of his state-issue sneaker.

Corean still termed their relationship a friendship, and she had told him not to count on her, but it had been some time since she'd signed a letter to him the way she'd signed the first, "Cordially, Corean." Steven wore his desires on his chest. A fellow-inmate, using a piece of wire and some ingenuity, had tattooed there the words "Corean's Playground." Only after she'd seen the tattoo did she choose to learn the particulars of his sentence: assaulting an undercover police officer with a car, fifty years.

Steven confronted the difficulty of the relationship as visiting time drew to a close. "If you decide to wait for me, I worry that you're doing time, same as I am—just marking off days—and I don't know if that's right. I mean, I want you to . . ." He stopped and shook his head. "You know. But I'd be lying if I said I could make the argument on your end."

Back home, sitting outside in a plastic chair just like those at the prison, Corean took no pleasure in the spectacular red and yellow pansies growing in her garden. She was staring grimly through Sooner Haven's fence. She could see two of her young grandchildren standing in a yard across the busy street. She had been barred from seeing the children because their mother was once again feuding with Corean's son. The toddlers, oblivious of the commands of a woman who was minding them, were staring right back at Corean through the fence. Inside her house, Corean had bibs and placemats on which their names had been emblazoned, and Dr. Seuss books, and a tiny bucket and shovel for digging in the garden. But this evening they were fenced off from her, as Steven was. She figured that this was what people meant by a midlife crisis—the sense that everything you wanted was just outside your reach.



Fella, home with the flu, sensed his mother's mood. A do-rag on his head and a black-and-white composition book in his hand, he came outside and plopped his large self on his mother's small lap. "Mommeee," he said, "I need your help with this speech." This spectacle prompted some little girls who were playing by the fence to shriek with laughter, and Corean couldn't help but laugh, too.

When she came home after prison, Fella unbuckled his mother's sandals, unasked, and pressed her swelling feet. After football practice or the late shift at the Taco Bueno, he often joined her in the house's one lighted room, where they compared their days until they drifted into sleep. Corean remembered how, when she was a child, hardship had turned members of her family against each other, and was grateful for her own family's closeness. But she also knew that single mothers could be seduced by it. Husbandless, they treated their Danas as confidantes and their Fellas as stand-in partners, and were shattered when those companions left them behind.

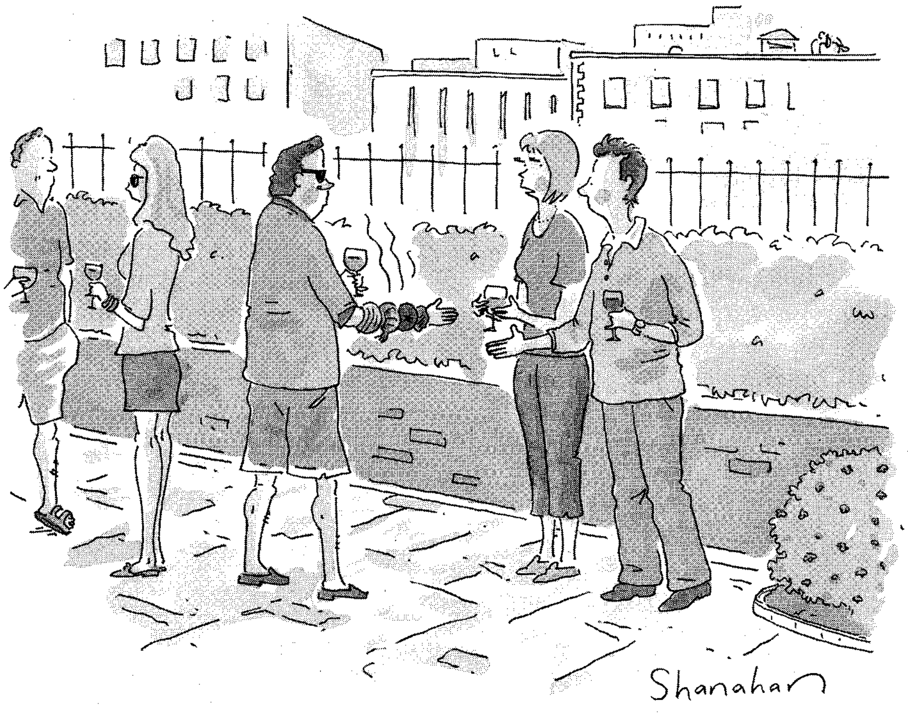
Eventually, Dana arrived for dinner, and conversation turned to Fella's college plans. He'd found a book and some pamphlets on scholarship options and discovered that in-state tuition could be covered by an Oklahoma program for poor children with good grades. He also saw that four years of college fees and books would leave his mother with nothing to live on, even if he avoided paying room and board by living at home.

When Corean imagined Fella at college, she saw him as being relaxed. "I don't see him fretting over how his mom can pay the phone bill—I see him free to study, and having enough change to take a girl out to lunch if he likes," she said. When Fella pictured himself at college, he dreamed of a dorm, not a tiny bedroom in Sooner Haven. And after reviewing his scholarship options he had decided it would behoove him to unearth some Native American roots.

In the neighborhood, the "Indian option" was an opportunity discussed with as much avidity as marriage. Cherokee, Shawnee, and Kickapoo reservations encircle Oklahoma City, and many city residents suspect that they are of mixed heritage. Those families which are able to document sufficient Native American blood can secure housing, health-care, and scholarship benefits far in excess of those available to families who are simply poor. "Benefits offered through official Native American status!" a video available from a Web site called Blackindians.com trumpets. Corean and her children knew several people who had pursued those benefits.

When Corean was young, her older siblings had told her that her high cheekbones were the Cherokee legacy of their father. Her paternal grandmother had thrilled Corean's siblings by demonstrating that she could sit on her hair. "Black hair just doesn't grow that long," Corean said. But to prove the rumor and secure Fella a scholarship required producing ancestral birth certificates to which tribal codes had been affixed. Corean's father had taken his family history with him when he vanished; all she really knew was that he was born in a southwest-Georgia peanut-farming town and died in another, four miles away. Still, as housekeeping work paid so poorly and no economically advantageous marriage was in the offing, this avenue of opportunity tempted her, and possessed an irony she appreciated. "I feel bad to say this," she told Fella and Dana, "but my father might be more help to this family dead than he ever was alive."

As the dinner dishes were washed and put away, Corean's children dropped the Indian option and began chiding their mother about her strictness. "No playing cards in the house, having to come in for family prayers and singing every night, not even a phone call from a boy until we turned sixteen—you were so mean when I was a teen-ager, it was pathetic," Dana said, wringing out a dish towel. "By the time I was seventeen, I was so itching to get away from you I bought my own tissue and soap and stored it in a box beneath my bed. And, when I finally did get my own place, me and the preacher's daughter went and got ourselves a bottle of Bacardi and we cut up, I can assure you."



"And this is Kabob."

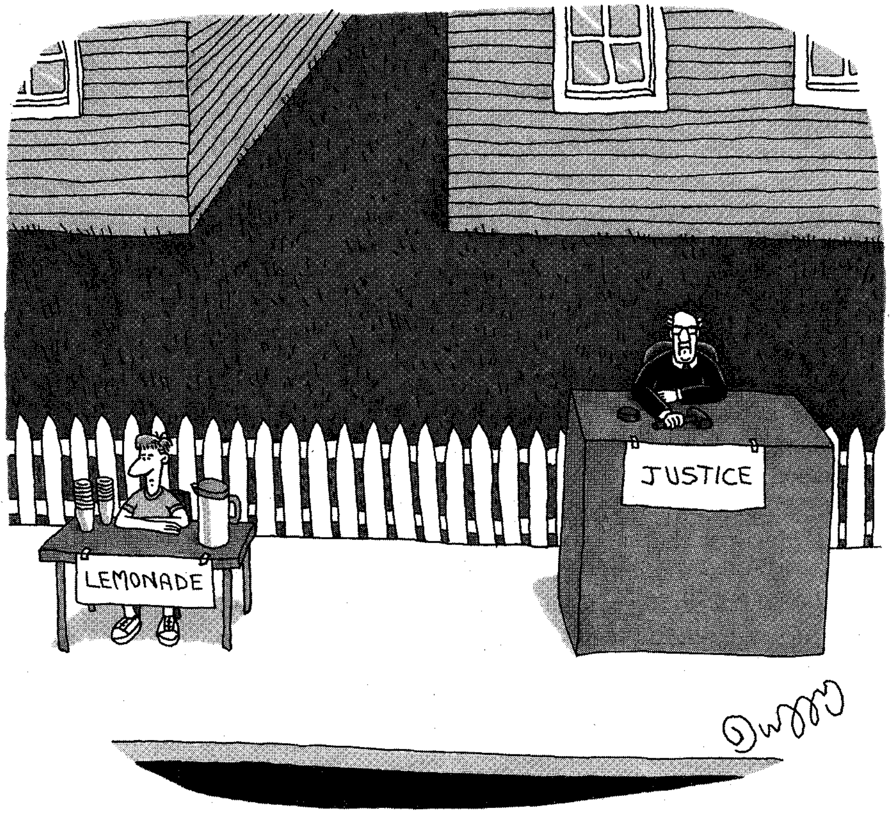
Corean said what she always said in the face of her children's mock recriminations: "When I see the Lord, I'm telling Him, look, if I messed up, I messed up trying." And that was the thing about the Indian idea. It reminded a make-do woman that there was usually something else left to try.

"They're all telling me, 'I'm here for you, we love you, I'll never let you go, our baby,' but it's too late," went a poem that Kim had written and placed in her cardboard box. "My feet is slowly walking the sand under the water." Her "Fragile—Eggs" depository now rested beside a concave orange-brown couch in the small home where her father, disabled by a stroke after leaving prison, lived. Kim was "in hiding" there, fearing that she would be arrested on the bad-check-writing charge. She still went to work every day, even when her friend Tiphani quit, forcing Kim back onto the bus. But the D.A.'s office knew that Kim lived in Sooner Haven. She gave up her unit and moved in with her father, three miles away.

Before leaving Sooner Haven, she had received the results of her general-equivalency exam. She'd aced everything except math. A teacher at a local community college had offered to help her master the math and apply for college. But the tutoring conflicted with Kim's telemarketing hours, which were non-negotiable. "Still, I've come this far, I'm not going to give up," she said. She now owed around nine hundred dollars in fines from the bounced checks. Increasingly fearful of doing jail time, she had decided to take out a loan from "a guy named Dave, whose whole business is helping people who have hot-check charges against them."

Kim still wanted to be Derrick's wife, and he had agreed to move in with her when they had the means for an apartment. Marriage class had helped her grasp the work involved in achieving a deeper level of commitment; in addition, it reinforced her sense that the child she longed for should have two parents. But steady proximity to Derrick had also given her a sense of how married life would and wouldn't change her general circumstances. Her father's couch was too narrow for two, so when she slept with Derrick now it was at his mother's apartment, where he was living to save money. "He goes to work in the early morning, I get home after midnight, and sometimes we both work six or seven days a week because of his son and my debts. So even when we coördinate our schedules we're tired. We play this video game called Tetris and go to sleep."

Some nights while Kim was trying to pitch A. T. & T.'s services to residents of Long Beach or Dayton or Scarsdale, the computers connected her to women who, she suspected, were struggling even harder than she was to get by—women who didn't want to switch phone carriers, who just wanted to keep another voice on the end of the line. Sometimes Kim's supervisor listened in, and he would cut off the call. But when he wasn't listening Kim asked the women about their jobs, the men who disappointed them, the bills they couldn't pay. She learned the callers' names, gave them her own, promised to stay in touch.



One frigid morning, Corean's daughter Shandy, who was weak from mononucleosis, drove Corean to the Oklahoma City Greyhound station. The previous week, Corean had taken Shandy to the hospital, a specialist, and the pharmacy, bouncing checks all the way. Shandy, although she was employed, could not afford health insurance. "I know what happened to Kim, but I was fearing major medical," Corean said. "If you're poor, the government will cover you until you're eighteen, and then after you're sixty-five. That's forty-seven years on your own." Unless, she added, eyes bright, "you are an Indian."

A ticket from Oklahoma City to the Georgia peanut fields of her father's birth cost sixty-nine dollars but the journey took seven buses and two days. Outside the Oklahoma City limits, Corean stared through the window at the designated capitals of a series of Indian nations—capitals that, from her vantage, looked suspiciously like gas stations selling off-brand beer.

It felt odd not to have a child in tow. "This is the future," she said. "I best get used to it." The strangeness was tempered by the fact that on the Greyhound people treated her with more respect than she was used to getting in the project—even when, in the Ozarks, drug-enforcement dogs were unleashed on the passengers' luggage. One bus driver reserved the front seat—farthest from the toilet smells—for Corean and an enormous pink church hat with dotted-swiss netting which she carried along with her Bible. "It's obvious you're a lady," he said. At the edge of the Mississippi delta, another driver pulled to the side of the road and held her elbow as she climbed stiffly off the bus. A minute later, she returned triumphant, brandishing a six-and-a-half-foot stalk of sugarcane. She hadn't seen cane since she was a child in the fields.

"People are quite friendly and interesting when you get out in the world," she said, feeling almost regretful when the bus pulled up to a secondhand-furniture store ("No Cash, No Credit, No Problem") that doubled as the bus depot of Sylvester, Georgia.

W. E. B. Du Bois, in "The Souls of Black Folk," called this part of southwest Georgia "perhaps the richest slave kingdom the modern world ever knew." As the proprietor of the furniture store watched her things, Corean set out on foot through the shabby downtown toward the county courthouse. The entrance hall, lined with framed portraits of white civic leaders, was being mopped by a black female prison crew, one of whom directed her to the public-records office. There, she was no longer the first lady of the cross-country Greyhound bus. A records search showed that her father had no birth certificate, let alone a tribal number. "Lotta poor folks just had their babies in the woods and didn't tell no one," a young black clerk tried to console her, directing her to the Corinthian-columned public library across the street. In the genealogy room there, two elderly white couples were paging through books like "Men of Mark in Georgia" and tapping intently into a stretch of new computers. "Before this, we were in Salt Lake City, doing the Mormon Church records," one of the men said to the other. "We have it nailed down to 1830." The burning numbness in her arm had kept Corean awake for two nights. She sat at a table before a pile of thick brown books, trying to make sense of twentieth-century county censuses. Decade after decade, her father's family—her family—had not been counted. Corean got a second wind in the evening when she called home to check on Fella. "Harvard, Yale, I don't know about them. I guess those are places for the extremely wealthy," she said. "But if we could pay for the best school in Oklahoma, and then medical school . . ."

The next day, Corean gave a man fifteen dollars to drive her to Albany, Georgia, just west of Sylvester. Her father had gone there after he left his wife and children in the citrus fields, and had died there in 1981. If he was an Indian, she reasoned, some deed or public filing might have noted his tribe. Approaching the courthouse, she met a black man in a cowboy hat who was emerging from a new BMW. He turned out to be a Cherokee chief, a successful exerciser of the Indian option, which she took to be an excellent omen.

Once her sugarcane had been scanned by a metal detector and scrutinized by a puzzled security squad, she set up shop in the county office of public records. Around her, young couples on lunch breaks were applying for marriage licenses. Corean bore down on a drawer of black plastic microfilm cannisters. She queried clerks who consulted databases, after which she paged through land records and worn manila files. And after several hours she realized only this: that her father had no records of deeds, no liens, no civil or criminal suits, no taxes owed nor businesses owned. Whether black or Indian, the man had been destitute enough, and law-abiding enough, to leave no trace in the public record.

She asked a secretary for the local phone book. Her family's surname was Smith, and as she scanned the pages she found a given name, Daisy, that sounded familiar. She phoned, and soon an old car arrived at the courthouse to take her to the pink cinder-block home of Miss Daisy, a woman she'd never met, who turned out to be her father's only sister.

There were four generations of women in Daisy's house. A seven-week-old girl, born to a single mother, slept beside a toddler wearing a T-shirt that said "Just Be Glad I'm Not Your Child." Daisy, a birdlike octogenarian, sat on a plaid recliner surrounded by Ragú spaghetti-sauce jars filled with tobacco-flecked spit. She had recently suffered a stroke, and was attended by a visiting speech therapist. "You can hardly swallow, Miss Daisy. Spit out the chaw so we can do this." When the therapist moved between Daisy and an NBC soap opera called "Passions," Daisy extended a wasted arm and tapped the woman out of the way.

Corean sat uneasily on the edge of the couch, asking questions about her father and the grandma who could sit on her hair. The younger women had also grown up believing they were part Cherokee, but they, too, had no proof. It was only when Corean was leaving that she noticed on a shelf behind the television a leatherette family Bible as worn as her own. Forgetting her manners, she seized it. In the centerfold she found what she suspected: a family tree filled out by a meticulous hand. One name differed from the others.

"Anyone know this Suzanna Sunbeam?" Corean's voice was hoarse, the way it got when she prayed too extravagantly on Sundays. The women shook their heads.

"Aaaaaz-uh," croaked the old woman, her eyes fixed on the TV screen. She didn't say anything else until "Passions" broke for a commercial. Then she said, "Suzanna was the Indian girl."

Corean clapped her hands, elated. "I knew it would be in the family Bible," she said. "I felt it!" But after a series of hugs among newfound relatives, themselves enamored of the Indian option, Corean returned to the family Bible and registered that Suzanna Sunbeam was not her father's mother but her grandmother's mother, which meant that there wasn't enough Indian blood in Corean's son Fella to do his doctor dreams a lick of good.

The signage in the Albany bus station where Corean fanned herself late that night was much as it had been in 1961, when the station was a staging area of the civil-rights movement. Probably then, as now, men kicked cardboard boxes of worldly goods across the station's greasy floor. But now the people in the station, waiting and working and scrawling "Lil Bit wuz here" on the historic bathroom wall, were black. Waiting for the bus, Corean opened her Bible. "And when we obey Him, every path He leads us on is fragrant with His loving kindness." Eventually, the belly of a Greyhound opened to receive a stalk of sugarcane destined for furtive planting in Sooner Haven.

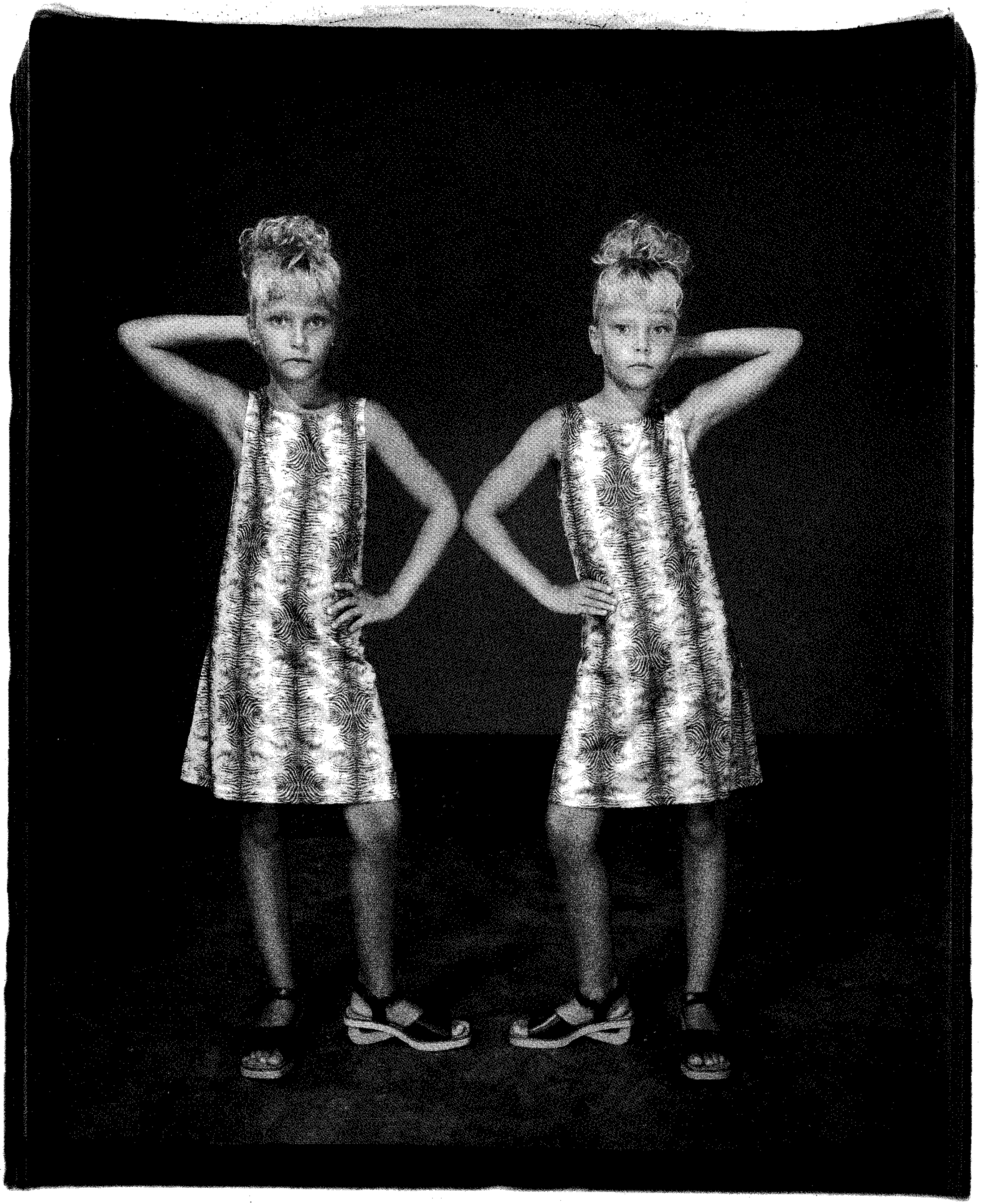
When she returned to Oklahoma, Corean applied to be a guinea pig in a pharmaceutical trial, to earn thirteen hundred dollars for Fella's tuition. After a physical, the testers rejected her, saying she was too ill and tired. Shortly afterward, she discovered that the mother of two of her grandchildren was living in a house where people with guns came and went. Corean hurried the toddlers back to Sooner Haven and did her best to raise them, despite losing financial help from Dana, who had been laid off from her longtime job. In the spring, Fella graduated with honors and found work moving furniture at a warehouse. He would stay in Oklahoma City for college.

One afternoon, Kim stopped to visit. She had paid off her bad-check charges and earned an award for being the third-most-productive salesperson in her office—just before the prospect of a National Do Not Call Registry led her employer to cut its workforce in half. Worried, she had applied for another job, as an aide to the homebound elderly. "It's only six dollars an hour, and no commissions," she said, "but some money's better than none." She and Derrick now shared a small apartment with a lockbox in a closet, for saving dimes and quarters. "This year," they told each other, "we're going to make something of ourselves."

Corean also saw Pastor Young, who was conducting another marriage seminar at Sooner Haven, and preaching to a larger crowd. "We're learning how to do this as we go, but we're getting there," he said. One day soon, he predicted, the training would produce its first wedding.

It could be Kim's, Corean thought. She suspected that it wouldn't be her own. Lately, she had been pulling back from Steven—"fading out," as he put it. "Anyway, when he's released, who knows if he will even want me," she said sadly. "Who knows what a person wants when he has choices." She still attended the mostly female singles meetings at her church, trying to heed what her kids said about not hiding her light under a bushel. But she was more broke than ever, the toddlers were exhausting, and the brakes on her car had given out. So most days she stayed inside the fence. ♦

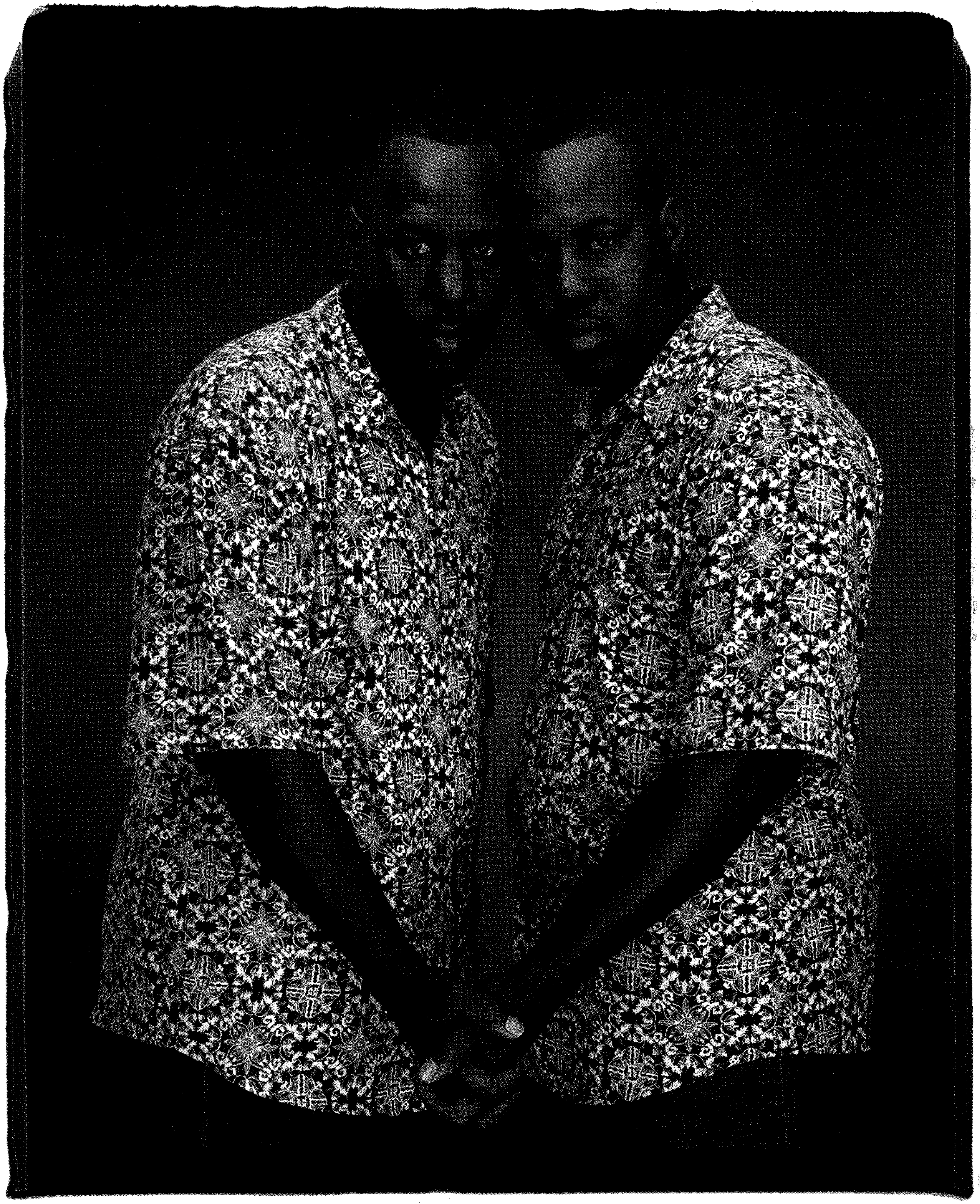
APERTURE



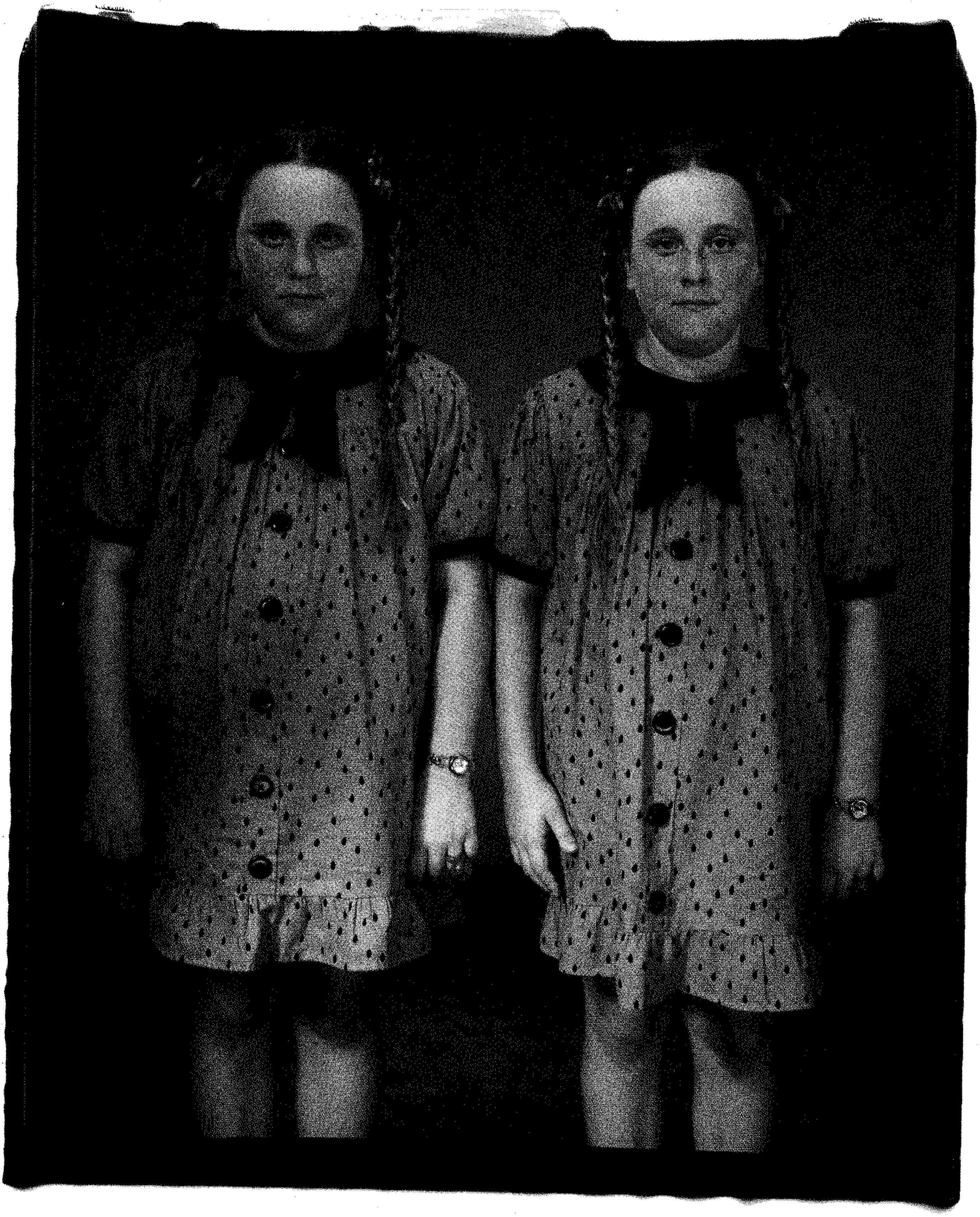
TWINS

BY MARY ELLEN MARK

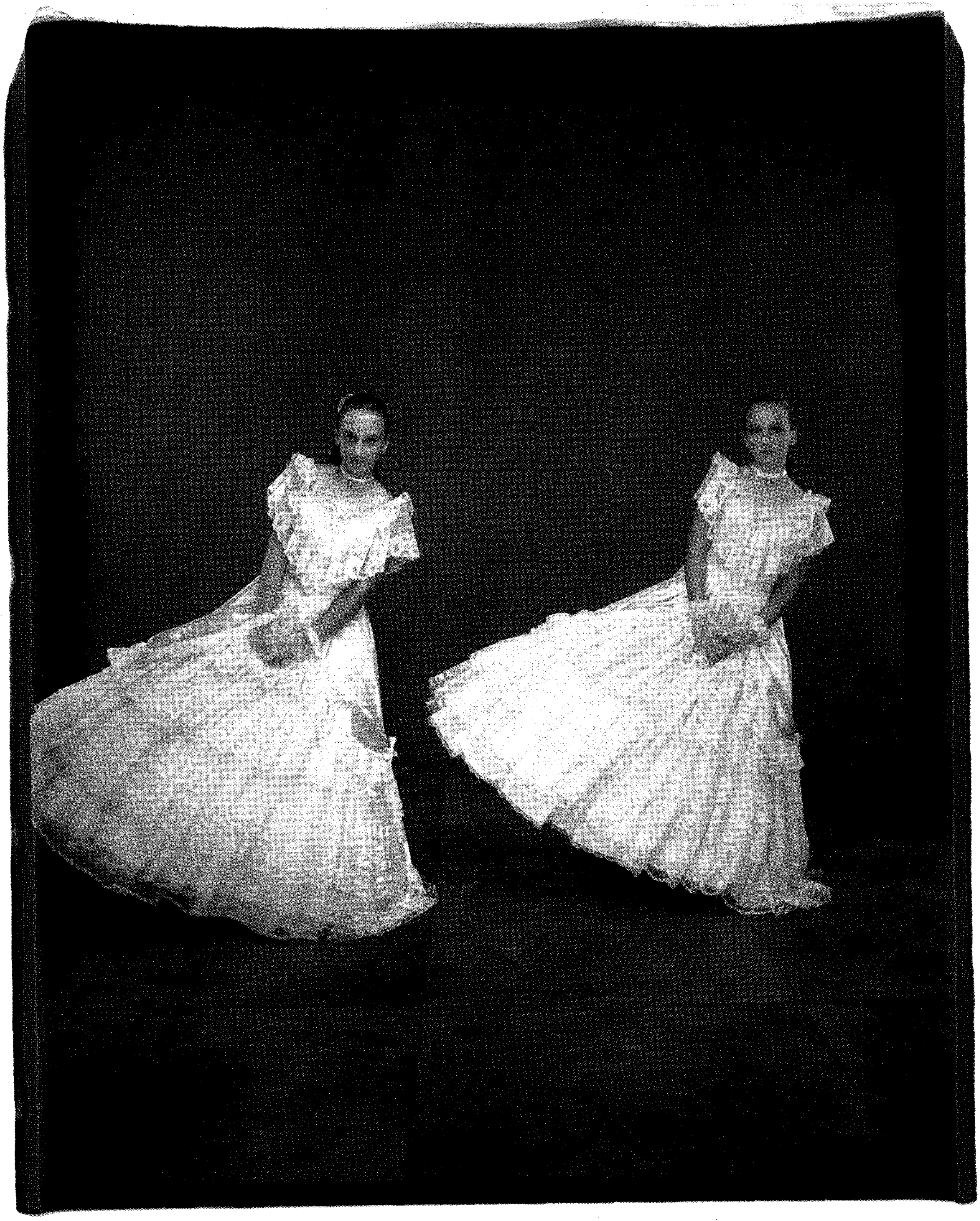
Tabitha and Tiffany Good, born May 21, 1992.



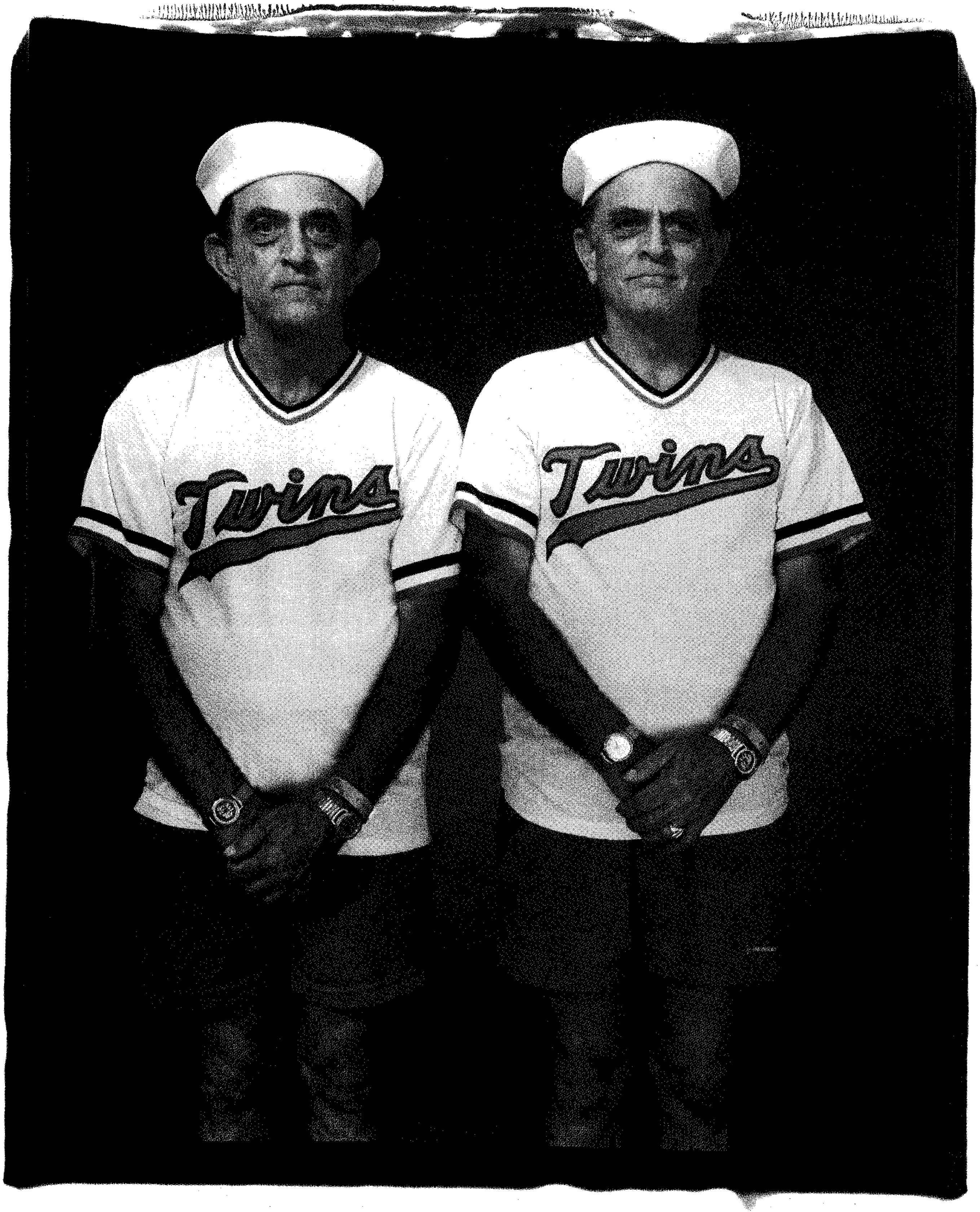
Shane and Shawn Riggins, born March 16, 1972.



Cayla and Mylee Simmermon, born January 14, 1991.



Kate and Sarah Shields, born December 14, 1988.

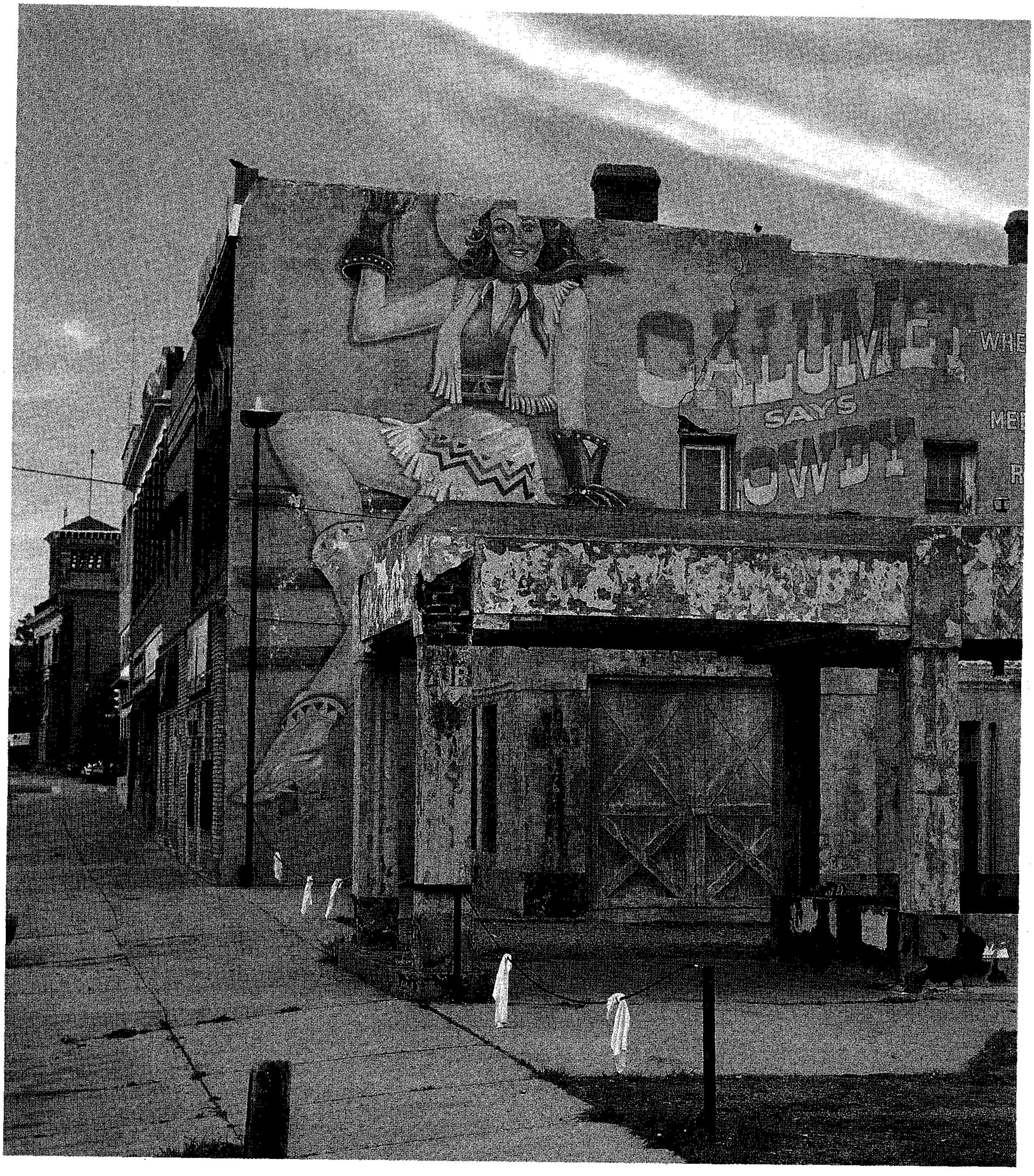

Twins
Twins

Walter and David Oliver, born September 3, 1935.

FICTION

WHAT KIND OF FURNITURE WOULD JESUS PICK?

BY ANNIE PROULX


CALUMET
SAYS
HOWDY

Budgel Wolfscale, a telegraph clerk from Missouri on his way to Montana to search for the yellow metal, stopped at a Wyoming road ranch one day in 1898 for a supper of fried venison and coffee, heard there was good range. For the next week he rode around the country, finally staked a homestead claim on a spread east of the Big Horns that had been cut from the holdings of a Scots outfit that pulled out the year before.

A year-round stream, Bull Jump Creek, cut the property, fringed by cottonwoods and willows, the shining maroon branches of water birch. It was still open country, though barbwire was coming in with the nesters. He built a shotgun cabin of hauled-out lodgepole, married one of the girls from a whorehouse in Ham's Fork, and, naming the ranch after the harp his mother had played, thought himself a Wyoming rancher. He wasn't that, but his sons and grandsons were.

The Harp skidded down the generations to Gilbert Wolfscale, born on the ranch in 1945, and in middle age still living a son's life with his mother in the old house, which had been gradually enlarged with telescoped additions until the structure resembled a giant spyglass built of logs. He ran a cow-calf operation, usually worked the place alone, for even inept help was hard to find. He was a tall man with heavy bones. His coarse skin seemed made of old leather upholstery, and, instead of lips, a small seam opened and disclosed his cement-colored teeth. There were no horses that could match his stamina. Despite his muscle mass he moved with fluid quickness. He surrounded himself with an atmosphere of affronted hostility, but balanced it with a wild and boisterous laugh that erupted at inappropriate times.

The old world was gone, he knew that. For some reason a day in the nineteen-fifties when all the ranchers and their hands had worked on the road rose often in his mind and with such vividness that he could smell the mud, the mineral odor of wet rock. He had been eight years old. It was the last rainy spring before that decade's drought sucked the marrow out of the state. The county road that ran between Kingring and Sheridan passed through seven ranches over a fifty-mile stretch. Under heavy melt from the mountains, it became an impassable sump of greasy mud and standing water. The county had no money. If the ranchers wanted to get to town they would have to fix the road themselves or wait until it dried. On a drizzling morning in April his father drank his coffee standing up.

"What say, Gib? Want to come along?"

They rode together on Butch, his father's roan saddle mount. The rain had stopped but heavy clouds moved with the bumping wind. Gilbert clutched the lard pail that held their lunch. They came to a place where men with shovels were strung out along the road. There was a section of an old corral still standing near the road and here men had leaned their tools, lunchpails, and bottles. A few had thrown their jackets on the ground. His father tethered Butch to a post.

While the men cleaned the borrow ditches and culverts, cut new drainage channels, built water bars, and hauled gravel, Gilbert hacked manfully at the mud with a broken hoe, but when Old Man Bunner told him to get out of his way or he'd chop off his legs he went to the weathered corral to play with sticks and rocks. He built a play corral of mud and broken miner's candle stems, and placed inside the rocks that were his horses. The wind cleared out the weather and by noon there was broken blue sky.

"Warmin up," called one of the men, stretching his back. The sun shone behind his ears, which turned the color of chokecherry jelly.

The lunch of cold pork and boiled eggs seemed the best thing Gilbert had ever eaten. There were two squares of his mother's coarse white cake with peanut-butter icing at the bottom of the pail. His father said Gilbert could have both pieces. He fell asleep on the way home, rocked by Butch's easy walk. His mother groaned with rage when she saw the mud on his clothes. The next morning his father went to work on the road without him and he cried until his mother slapped him. The work went on for a week, and when it ended a truck could get over the road. The first time they drove past the place he looked for his play corral. He could see one miner's candle stem. The rest had blown away. The rock horses were still there. Fifty years later the road was gravelled and graded by the county but he still looked when he drove past the place, the old corral now nothing but a single post. The prairie had swallowed his horse rocks.

After Gilbert Wolfscale inherited the ranch, he enlarged the two irrigated alfalfa fields, which made it possible, in bad years, to feed the cattle through the winter and, in good years, to sell hay to less fortunate outfits. These two fields kept the ledger ink black. He came up with other ideas to increase income. He thought of butchering and packing the beef himself to bypass the middlemen who took the money while the rancher did the work, but the local stores preferred to stay with the chain suppliers. So he put an ad in the paper looking for customers and found half a dozen, but they didn't eat enough beef to make the venture pay and a woman from town complained that there were bone splinters in the ground beef. He raised turkeys, thinking surefire Thanksgiving and Christmas markets, but never sold very many, even when he put strings of cranberries around their necks. His mother spent days making the cranberry necklaces, but people wanted the plastic-wrapped, pre-basted Safeway turkeys with breasts like Las Vegas strippers. He and his mother ate the turkeys themselves, his mother canning most of the meat. By spring, they were sick of the smell of turkey soup.

Some of the original chock-and-log fence—built not of split rails nor slender poles but big logs—stood in the high pastures nearest the forest, but much had been replaced with five-strand barbwire. He could almost see the ground compressing under the heavy log weight. How many men had helped his grandfather build that fence of tree trunks? Gilbert put in his time working on the barb fences, which no longer had the tensile strength of fresh wire but were patched and mended with short lengths of various gauge. In an earlier decade, struggling to finish the job on a hot afternoon, he had cast about for a stick or something to twist tight a diagonal cross-brace wire, but the only thing at hand was a cow's bleached leg bone with its trochlea head, which seemed made to jam fence wire tight. It worked so well that he collected and used cow bones in dozens of places. These bony fences and the coyote skulls nailed to the corner posts gave the Harp a murderous air.

He was a model of rancher stubborn-

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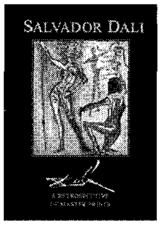

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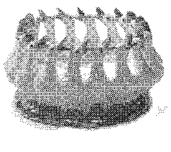

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ness, savagely possessive of his property. He did everything in an odd, deliberate way, Gilbert Wolfscale's way, and never retreated once he had taken a position. Neighbors said he was self-reliant, but there was a way they said it that meant something else.

Seven miles north of the Harp on the Stump Hole Road lived May and Jim Codenhead. Gilbert had gone to grade school with May—she was then May Alwen. May's brother, Sedley Alwen, a big, good-natured kid with stringy arms, had been Gilbert's best friend. Gilbert had courted May for a year, taken it for granted that Sedley would be his brother-in-law, but she'd strung him along and then, in a sudden move on Christmas Day in 1966, married Jim Codenhead. Jim then was nothing more than an illiterate Montana hand working on the Alwen place.

May taught him to read until he could fumble through the newspaper.

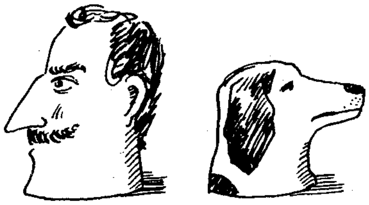
"That's the shits, man," said Sedley sympathetically and took Gilbert on a two-day drunk, as much a salute to his draft notice as balm for Gilbert's disappointment.

The marriage wasn't unprecedented. For those who took the long view and had patience it was the classic route for a lowly cowhand to own his own spread—marry the rancher's daughter. In retaliation Gilbert went to a New Year's dance in Sheridan, found Suzzy New, and in ten days pressured her into a fast marriage.

Suzzy New was slender and small-boned, with something French about her child-size wrists, a contrast to Gilbert, six foot four, bullnecked with heavy shoulders. She was nimble-fingered and a talented embroiderer. In the flush of their first months together Gilbert bragged that she was so handy she could make a pair of chaps for a hummingbird. She was quiet, disliked arguments and shouting, the only child of elderly parents. She held herself tensely and had a way of retreating into her thoughts. She believed herself to be a very private person. She slept badly, sensitive to the slightest abnormal sound—the creak of a house timber, the rising wind, a raccoon forcing its way through the skirting of the house and under the kitchen floorboards. She had let herself be bullied into marrying Gilbert, and within days of the ruinous act she bitterly regretted it.

All her life she had heard and felt the Wyoming wind and took it for granted. There had even been a day when she was a young girl standing by the road waiting for the school bus when a spring wind, fresh and warm and perfumed with pine resin, had caused a bolt of wild happiness to surge through her, its liveliness promising glinting chances. But out at the ranch it was different. The house lay directly in line with a gap in the encircling hills to the northwest, and through this notch the prevailing wind poured, falling on the house with ferocity. The house shuddered as the wind punched it and slid along its sides like a released torrent from a broken dam. Week after week in winter it sank and rose, attacked and feinted. When she put her head down and went out to the truck it yanked at her clothing, shot up her sleeves, whisked her hair into a ravelled fright wig. Gilbert seemed not to notice, but then, she thought, he probably regarded it as *his* wind, and no doubt took pleasure in such a powerful possession.

Sedley went to Vietnam. Gilbert, who had a growth inside his nose, was 4-F despite his strength and muscle. Sedley was captured by the Vietcong and spent several years in a bamboo cage. He came back a different person, crisscrossed with sudden rages brought on by inconsequential events such as the rattle of dishes or a truck crossing the bridge. He was thought to be unstable and in need of watchful care. He moved in with May and Jim. May could calm Sedley down when he was having one of his fits. She had always been close to him, had, from the time she was a small child with nightmares, padded down the hall to his moonless north room, climbed into his bed for warmth and protection. The infant she bore six months after she married Jim Codenhead might have been her brother's child or, for that matter, Gilbert Wolfscale's, or even Jim Codenhead's. For years, whenever Gilbert was at their



house, he studied the child, Patty, trying to work out whom she resembled. He could come to no conclusion.

Vietnam nightmares tortured Sedley Alwen. Sometimes, to give May a break, Gilbert made the long drive to Cheyenne, taking Sedley to the Veterans Administration hospital, where he saw the shrink and got his prescriptions renewed. It was a two-day trip and they stayed at a motel overnight, sharing a room. After the session Sedley would be talkative. Gilbert listened attentively to his stories of torture and comrades' deaths. It was at these times Sedley resembled the friend of his childhood, excited and eager. But he could not have whiskey. They tried it once and found out. Whiskey made him act up, smashing the motel furniture and howling at the light fixture in the ceiling.

By 1999 Gilbert was fifty-four and caught in the downward ranching spiral of too much work, not enough money, drought. It got drier and drier, grasshoppers appearing as early as April and promising a plague in August. The grass crackled like eggshells under his feet. There was no color in the landscape, the alkali dust muting sage, stones, the earth itself. When a vehicle passed along the road a fine cloud spread out and slowly settled. The air was baked of scent except for the chalky dust. He was conscious of how many things could go wrong, of how poorly he'd reckoned the ranch's problems.

To the new-moneyed suitcase ranchers who had moved in all around him—ex-California real-estate agents, fabulous doctors, and retired cola executives—the Harp looked a skanky run-down outfit. They noticed the yard littered with stacks of rusted sheet metal held down by railroad ties, a pile of crooked fence posts inhabited by chipmunks, the long string of log additions to the old house. Some of these rich people, heated with land fever and the thought of a bargain, came to Gilbert and offered to buy his ranch. He could see in their eyes how they planned to bulldoze the house and build mansions with guest cottages.

"Them rich pricks are lower than a snake's ass in a wagon track," he said to his mother. "I told him my granddad homesteaded this place and if I ever seen his California butt on my property again I'd shoot it off. I looked him right in the eye and he got the message. He turned color so fast he farted."

His mother produced her hard little laugh.

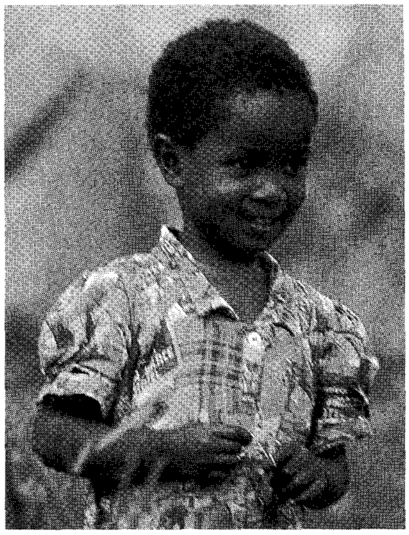
It had always been dry country and no one born there expected more than a foot of rainfall in a good year. The drought halved that and he could see the metamorphosis of grazing land into desert. The country wanted to turn to sand dunes and rattlesnakes, wanted to scrape off its human ticks. Gilbert didn't have enough hay to feed his own stock. Everything told him that the day of the rancher was fading, but he dodged admitting it. He blamed the government, he blamed Salt Lake City. The damn Mormons, he said, had seeded the clouds for the Olympics, sucking out all the snow moisture before it reached Wyoming. The ranch-house well was eleven hundred feet deep and the water brackish. In the drought years of the nineteen-thirties and again in the fifties his father had put in earthen dams and stock ponds, and in wet years they had held water but were now silted up and dried and stood as unsightly pits filled with weeds. In the center of one dry hole he piled an immense stack of brush, adding more every year, intending to burn it with the first good snow.

He was pestered. Some newcomer wanted a shortcut easement through the ranch to his million-dollar luxury house on the other side. A long-nosed Game and Fish biologist nagged him about fences that blocked the passage of pronghorn. Hunters wanted to shoot his deer. A busybody woman straight out of agricultural school came from the Extension Service one day and lectured him about protecting stream banks from cow-hoof erosion, about pasture rotation to prevent overgrazing.

"I heard all that shit. But I'll tell you what. I let the cows graze where they want and drink where they will. Been doin this for a while. Guess I know somethin about it." He stood in a truculent posture, legs apart, chin thrust forward. The woman shrugged and left.

His wife, Suzzy, had left him to live in Sheridan, sixty miles distant, in the spring of 1977, when the two boys, Monty and Rod, were still young. Those boys were doomed, said Gilbert, smacking his hand on the table for emphasis, to

Don't think of it as charity. Think of it as hope for one little child.



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grow up without a father's guidance and example, injured because they were denied a boy's life on the ranch.

"If he wants a see the kids why can't he just come into town?" Suzzy said to her mother on the phone after the split. Her complaining voice rose, dipped. "You know I put in years on that ranch, and nothin really worked right. Half the time there wasn't water and when there was water it was nasty. We couldn't get in or out in the winter. No telephone, no electricity, no neighbors, his mother always naggin, and the *work!* He wore me down. 'Do this, do that,' bullyin ways. Keep that old house clean? Couldn't be done. He could a sold the place fifty times over and lived decent if he got a job like a normal human bein, but would he? No. I wouldn't relive those years for nothin." Once she had made up her mind to leave, her own stubbornness emerged. But Gilbert refused to agree to a divorce and the separation and enmity dragged on.

In town she got a cash-register job at the Big Billy supermarket and as soon as the two boys were old enough to run errands and deliver papers she made them get after-school and weekend jobs as well. She wanted to show them there were better things than cows and debt.

The Big Billy job was no good. Not only was the pay low but she disliked having to repeat "Have a nice day" to people who deserved to be ridden bareback by the Devil wearing can openers for spurs, and one day she quit to take a job as a filing clerk in the county treasurer's office. It gravelled Gilbert that she handled his property-tax and vehicle-registration papers.

She wore him down on the divorce and he gave up after a fight in town in her new house. She had bought an old brick mansion with big trees in the yard and an ornamental iron fence around it. In the eighteen-eighties the house had belonged to a Chicago merchant who used it two or three times a year to oversee his ranch investments. Gilbert did not understand how she could afford this house. They had argued, then screamed. Gilbert stood with his legs apart and his arms hanging loose. Another man would have recognized this as a bad sign but she could not stop blaming him, and he, goaded to violence, slapped her a good one and she came at him and yanked out a clump of his hair in the front where it would show, ran to the back of the house, and called the sheriff. When the law came she accused Gilbert of assault, showing the red mark on her cheek as proof.

"What about *this*?" shouted Gilbert, pointing to his bleeding scalp, but Sheriff Brant Smich, his second cousin, ignored him. When the divorce finally came through it was settled that if he wanted the boys to help out on the ranch for a weekend he would have to drive in and fetch them and he would have to pay them for their labor. He had paid practically nothing for child support during the long separation, she said, it was the least he could do. He protested, said he had cancelled checks to prove he had certainly paid adequate if not luxurious support.

"Take it to court," she said, "you think you been treated so bad."

Neither of the boys came willingly to the ranch. They appeared only in times of crisis after Gilbert telephoned Suzzy, demanding their help—spring branding, fence work. They let themselves be dragged out for a weekend then, sulky and grudging. They sassed their grandmother and whispered and snickered when they saw cows bulling. A day's work was not in them. They wanted only to ride the horses. It was clear to Gilbert that at his death they would sell the place as fast as they could. One day someone would find his stiff corpse out in the pasture, the wire cutters in his hand, or they would find him fallen in the muddy irrigation ditch, as he had found his own father. He would never be able to pass on to them how he felt about the land.

His allegiance to the place was not much of a secret, for even outsiders perceived his scalding passion for the ranch. His possessive gaze fell on the pale teeth of distant mountains, on the gullies and washes, the long draw shedding Indian scrapers and arrowheads. His feeling for the ranch was the strongest emotion that had ever moved him, a strangling love tattooed on his heart. It was his. It was as if he had drunk from some magic goblet full of the elixir of ownership. And although the margins of Bull Jump Creek had been trampled bare and muddy by generations of cows, although there were only one or two places along it still flushed with green willow, the destruction had happened so gradually that he had not noticed, for he thought of the ranch as timeless and unchanging in its beauty. It needed only young men to put it right. So his thoughts

THE SECOND CHILD

You see I, too,
was second in order. Two.

Before you arrived
for a time I cried

nightly at the fattening, spelling the end
of our tight, well-tended

trio. The carefully scheduled bliss
of bath and bed—luxurious

brace of both to read a single book,
darting between us, her drinking-all-in, wee weighty look,

her finger gesture toward some new developmental toy
or crystal bit of babble our post-crib nightcap, rehashed joy. . . .

Now no rehash, littler miss,
of your darting, airy imitation of her searing kiss:

down babyhood's brief corridor you disappear behind
her, the master dancer, your tutor in body and mind,

you not just child but sister. And while
she—so fierce, perversely proud—will be not child

but childhood's star, and pound the trail
and suffer in her art and, hell or high, refuse to fail

(you see it hurts, I love her so),
you will carelessly, sly, my sidelong darling, go

after, first toddling understudy, then patiently aslant
toward something other, invited by a glint I can't

discount. When your delighted eyes
dance at her back, assess the scene, I surmise

the end, and your means
to it. Like me—

for now I see, you showed me—
you'll be happy.

—*Deborah Garrison*

turned again and again on ways to get his sons to see and love the ranch.

In 1982, Monty was fourteen and Rod two years younger. Gilbert, waiting in the truck in front of Suzzy's house, heard Monty inside bellowing at his mother in his cracking voice, "I don't want a go. It stinks out there, there's nothin a do," and he could not dodge the fact that his sons hated the ranch. In a desperate attempt to make the place more attractive to them he had the power company run out poles and wires, a terrible expense and useless, too, as the boys came no more often. The only benefit, if benefit it was, was the small television set he bought and put in the living room, where he would lie on the sofa under one of his mother's quilts and watch men wrestling anacondas, riding motorcycles inside enormous wooden barrels. His mother liked the television, but claimed to be shocked by much of what she saw.

"It is company, I'll say that, but where they find them fool people to cut up so I don't know."

He wasn't lonely. There was his mother, he was a church deacon, a member of the Cattlemen's Association, he went to his neighbors' potluck suppers and barbecues, and about once a month drove to town and got half drunk, bought a woman, and made it back to the ranch before the old haymaker cleared the horizon. He was not a veteran but he knew all the local veterans and often went to the V.F.W. with them to drink and listen to Vietnam stories.

He had always taken an interest in Vietnam. He wondered what it was about combat that so changed men, for all of those who had been in school with him, the ones who came back, were marked by what they had seen and endured. He knew them and he didn't know them. Sedley came back angry and crazy, Russ Fleshman returned as a windbag, Pete Kitchen was reclusive and lived in a horse trailer at the back of the old Kitchen ranch. Something had gone wrong for Willis McNitt, leaving him dead-voiced and troubled. They all referred emotionally to the war, now so many years past, and Fleshman sometimes put his face in his hands and cried. And there were the ones who didn't come back: Todd Likwartz, Howard Marr, and several he hadn't known. When Gilbert thought of them a phrase came into his mind—"Now they know what Rhamses knows." His mother belonged to the generation that had memorized poems in school, and one, "Little Mattie," on the death of a thirteen-year-old girl, had fastened itself relentlessly in her recall with the tolling line "Now she knows what Rhamses knows." She quoted from it throughout her life and still sometimes treated her son to a recitation of the entire piece with the stilted emphasis learned so long ago in a little Wyoming schoolhouse.

Gilbert Wolfscale listened to the veterans. He wanted to understand what he had missed. It had been the great experience of the time of his young manhood and he had been absent. It was as though the veterans had learned a different language, he thought, listening to Fleshman's scattershot of *didi mau*, Agent Orange, *beaucoup*, Jodies, 105s, Willy-Petes, and K-Bars. He caught at the names—Phu Bai, Khe Sanh, Quang Tri—wondering if these were the Vietnamese equivalents of Rawlins or Thermopolis. The veterans did not seem so much tragic victims as eccentric members of a select club. He felt himself an outsider. They had got the edge on him.

One year, Willis McNitt sat behind him at the August rodeo. It was the hottest summer he had ever known. The horses were blowing and their coats white with salty sweat, the bulls stood in the chutes with their heads down and bucked feebly. There had been a freak accident at the stock pens. The rodeo grounds were old, put up in the nineteen-thirties, all wood fence and posts, and somehow a kid watering the roping calves had fallen or been knocked down and mashed his face against a splintery post. A long sliver had run into the flesh below his eyebrow and he had stumbled away from the pens, blood coursing down the back of his hand, which he had put instinctively to the wound. He had not cried out, just stumbled into sight with blood seeping between his fingers, making the crowd gasp. As the ambulance bore him away Gilbert said to no one in particular, "They ought a tear out them damn old wood posts and get good metal."

"I seen somethin like that in Nam," said Willis behind him in his flat, heavy voice. Willis had a son at the university, studying anthropology. The kid—Coot McNitt—had a half-baked theory that rice cultivation had developed to replace a

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shortage of maggots in early man's diet. If you listened to him long enough he'd make you believe it. "We was in a free-fire zone and the kid next a me got shot in the eye. He said, 'I been shot in the eye,' said it five or six times, real quiet, like he couldn't quite take it in. Couldn't believe it. Then he laid down beside me and commenced a kick and thrash and ever time he kicked the blood pumped up through his eye like a school water fountain."

"God," said Gilbert. "Did he—?"

"Died. A kid, eighteen years old, younger'n Coot. Couldn't believe he'd been shot. I was nineteen but after that I felt like a old man."

"You ain't old, Willis. Hell, you're my age."

"Yeah."

The word dropped like a stone.

One day, Gilbert Wolfscale's mother opened an official-looking letter from the California State Allocation Department. She read that she had inherited a sum of money from someone in that state. All she had to do was fill out the enclosed form, mail it back, and in six or eight weeks she would receive the inheritance. She spent two hours filling out the form, with its demands for address, Social Security number, date of birth, bank-account numbers, and other tedious details. She sat so long at the table with this form that her left leg went to sleep and when she got up to go to the kitchen and make a cup of tea it buckled. She fell and broke her hip.

She recuperated very slowly. Even after the break had healed, Gilbert had to drive her in to Sheridan for weekly therapy. He sometimes wondered why she didn't get one of her friends to drive her. She was always on the phone gabbing with her cronies and most of them still drove. He heard her talking with them about football, which she watched avidly on the television.

"I'm for them Bears. I couldn't never be for them Packers."

When he asked her why she did not arrange a trip to town with Luce or Florence or Helen she said, "They're not family. Suppose the doctor was to give me bad news. I'd want a be with blood kin, not some other person."

While she was in with the therapist Gilbert walked around the windy town streets rather than sit in a plastic chair in the stuffy waiting room. In a music store he looked at CDs, wondering at the proliferation of bands with trendy, foolish names. Behind a stiff plastic divider labelled "MISCELLANEOUS" he found birdcalls, tap dancing, the whistles of steam locomotives from around the world. The last CD was "Remembering Vietnam." The cover showed a grimy infantryman staring up at a helicopter. The back copy listed "Firefight," "Shrapnel," "ARVN," "Jungle Patrol," "Rain," "APC Convoy." He bought it.

In the truck driving home his mother said, "I don't have to go back there but a few more times, looks like, and thanks to heaven. Some a the strangest people settin in that waitin room. These two women got talkin about their Bible class. Sounded pretty modern, you know, tryin a link the Bible to nowadays. But this Bible class *they* went to was tryin a guess how it would be if Jesus showed up in Sheridan. That got them all excited and there they set, what would he do for work. They both said he could easy find a job workin construction. Would he have his own house and would it be like a trailer or a regular house or a apartment? Then they got at the furniture, what kind a furniture would Jesus pick for his place. And you know how you get thinkin about things you overhear? Wasn't none a my business but there I set, crazy as they was, wonderin if he'd pick out a maple rockin chair or a sofa with that Scotchgard fabric or what."

A month before her fall his mother had bought some bright-colored kitchen sponges. One of them was purple and she had developed an affection for it, never using it on greasy pots or to wipe up nasty spills. He dribbled coffee on the counter one morning and began to mop at the spill with the distinguished sponge.

"What are you doin! Don't use that—take the pink one. You dunderhead, I'm savin that one."

"For what, Ma?"

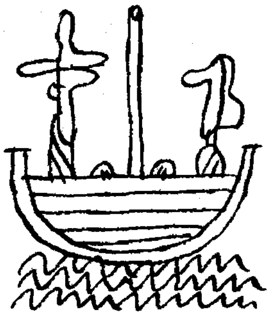
"For the good glasses." She meant the crystal wineglasses with the gold rims that had been passed down from Granny Webb and had stood inverted in the china cupboard for as long as he could remember. He had never known them to be used. Inside the china cupboard next to the glasses was a photograph of his father's mother in a black silk twill dress, looking freeze-dried and mournful.

"Where is that stupid mailman?" his

mother said, pulling back the curtain and looking for the plume of dust along the road.

It was days before he had a chance to listen to the CD. He was on his way to the bank. The soul of leaf susurration, cicadas, crickets, mortars, a calling bird with a voice like a kid hooting down a cardboard tube, snatches of talk, incoming fire, deafening helicopter fibrillation filled the truck.

Saturday was grocery day, but his mother said, "I don't feel up to it. You just get what we need, bread and eggs. Coffee. Whatever else you see that looks good. I don't have much appetite these days anyhow. And I want a wait for the mail. I'm expectin mail."



He bought the groceries and on the way out of town passed the library. Two miles beyond it he thought of books—books on Vietnam—and he turned around. He came away with three, all they had, read them in bed that night, and fell asleep with a book on his face. He awoke frightened and shouting, thinking something was smothering him. The exhaled moisture from his mouth had formed a round dimple in the page.

It was not long after this that his mother began to give way. She would look at him and say, "Where's Gilbert? Out playin, I bet. I want him to fill up that wood box." And later she would tell him, "You'll have to fend for yourself for supper. I can't cook without no wood." He felt a pang of guilt, for there had been many times when he was a boy that he had dodged the wood box. But she kept asking if the mail had come until Gilbert, exasperated, said, "You expectin a letter from the President or what?" She shook her head and said nothing.

In 1999, Gilbert's son Monty turned thirty-two, a big dark-haired fellow, still single, who worked as a roofer in Colorado. Gilbert hadn't seen him in years. Rod, the younger one, lived in Sheridan, a block away from his mother, worked in Buffalo in a video-rental store. He was married and had two children, twin girls, whom Gilbert had seen only once and had never touched nor held. The little girls had never been to the ranch. The boy's wife, Debra, worked, too, answering the telephone at Equality Cowboy Travel. Gilbert sometimes dreamed that they would have more children—boys—and that these little grandsons would love the ranch, would grow up knowing what a beautiful place the Wolfscales owned. They would love it as he did and take it on when he went.

Gilbert's mother turned eighty-one. The purple sponge, though somewhat faded, was largely unchanged, not to be used. She took to rummaging through the desk looking for pencil and paper, settled on a little notebook, spiral-bound at the top and with lined paper. She spent hours at the kitchen table bent over this notebook, thinking, occasionally scrawling something down or erasing everything, tearing out the spoiled sheet and crumpling it.

"What are you writin, Ma? Your biography? Cowgirl poetry?"

"No," she said and put her arm around the notebook so he couldn't see it, like a child protecting a test paper from a cheating neighbor.

On a very cold March day he went into town to the ranch-equipment center; the used aircraft tires he'd ordered for the bush hog were in. If the weather warmed up later in the week he'd work on pulling old sagebrush out of the three-mile pasture. In town the bank thermometer read minus two and a harsh wind made it seem like the freezing pits of Hell. He ordered a pizza. Clouds were moving in as he drove back, eating the cheesy slices, and as he turned in to the ranch the first fine flakes fell through the air.

The house was silent. He thought his mother might be napping and went out to the shop, where he changed the bush hog's tires. The days were growing longer and he worked until twilight. Back in the house he was disturbed by the deep silence. Usually his mother watched crime programs on television at this hour. He went to her room and knocked on the door.

"Ma! Ma, you O.K.? I'm goin a start supper now." There was no answer. He opened the door and saw his mother would not again want any supper.

It was a shock to learn that her bank account was at flat zero. He couldn't un-

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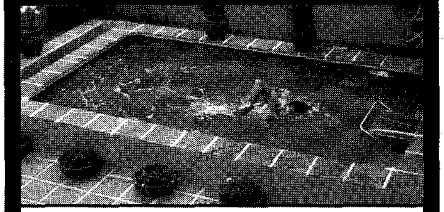

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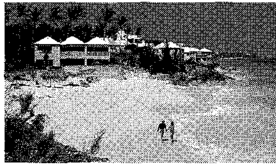

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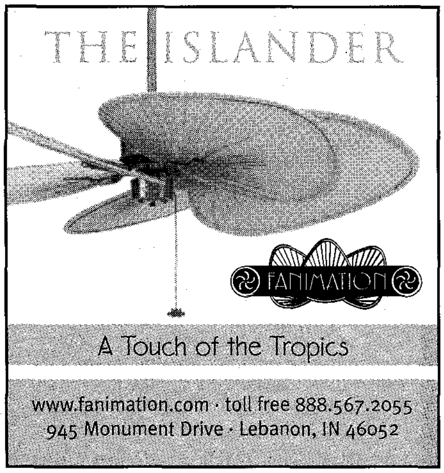

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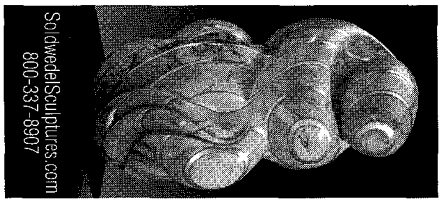

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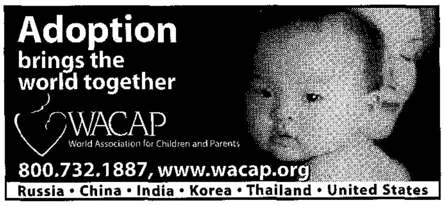

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derstand what she had spent the money on. He remembered her telling him when she broke her hip that she had over six thousand dollars set aside for "—*you* know." And he did know. For her funeral costs. He had to scratch to come up with the money for a decent coffin.

Cleaning out her room, he came across the spiral-bound notebook. It was filled with plaintive letters to the California State Allocation Department, asking when her inheritance would come. Folded in the front of the notebook was the original letter. He telephoned the number at the bottom of the page but got a message that the number had been disconnected. Gilbert began to guess there was some sort of scam. He called Sheriff Brant Smich, asked him if he knew anything about California State Allocation.

"Hell, yes. You get a letter from them sayin about you inherited some money and askin for your bank-account numbers? Don't believe none of it. Don't answer them. Bring the letter to the post office. They're after that outfit for mail fraud."

With his mother gone, civilization began to fall away from him like feathers from a molting hen. In a matter of weeks he was eating straight from the frying pan.

As is usual in the ranch world, things went from bad to worse. The drought settled deeper, like a lamprey eel sucking at the region's vitals. He had half-seen the scores of trucks emblazoned CPC—Consolidated Petroleum Company—speeding along the dusty road for the past year, and knew that they were drilling for coal-bed methane on public land adjacent to his ranch. They pumped the saline wastewater laden with mineral toxins into huge containment pits. The water was no good, he knew that, and it seemed a terrible irony that in such arid country water could be worthless. He had always voted Republican and supported energy development as the best way to make jobs in the hinterland. But when the poison wastewater seeped from the containment pits into the groundwater, into Bull Jump Creek, into his alfalfa irrigation ditches, even into the household well water, he saw it was killing the ranch.

He fought back. Like other ranchers who once again felt betrayed by state and federal government, he wrote letters and went to meetings protesting coal-bed methane drilling and the hundreds of service roads and drill rigs and heavy trucks that were tearing up the country. The meetings were strange, for ecological conservationists and crusty ranchers came together in the same room, in agreement for once. He noted with satisfaction that the schoolteacher, Dan Moorhen, a bleeding-heart liberal ecology-minded freak, admitted that ranchers were the best defense against developers chopping up the land, that ranches and ranchers kept the Old West alive. When the gas-company reps or politicians came, the meetings were rancorous and loud and at the end people signed petitions with such force their pens ripped the paper, but it all meant nothing. The drilling continued, the poison water seeped, the grass and sage and alfalfa died. All he could do was hang on to the place.

He was unprepared for the telephone call from a neighbor, Fran Bangharmer. It was the morning of the Fourth of July.

"Too bad about Suzzy, all that right on the front page, too."

"What do you mean?" he said. "What was on the front page?"

"Arrested for embezzlin. Monday's paper."

"What!" Fran's voice was subtly triumphant, tinged with Schadenfreude, but Gilbert barely listened, hung up as soon as he could and drove into town to find a three-day-old paper and read for himself that his ex-wife had, for years, been siphoning tax money into a private bank account by a complex series of computer sleights of hand he could not understand.

He went to the county jail and tried to see her but was turned away.

"She don't want to see you, Gib, and she's got that right."

Half of the stores in town were closed for the holiday. Already there were clusters of people along the sidewalk, although the parade didn't start until one o'clock. In despair he drove down to Buffalo to the video store where Rod worked. It was open, the windows draped with red-white-and-blue ribbons. A huge poster read: "RODEO DAYS! JULY 4 TO 10!"

He found his younger son stocking the shelves with gaudy boxes. As he stood behind him he noticed the son's thinning hair and felt the hot breath of passing time.

"Rod?" he said, and the young man turned around.

"Dad." They looked at each other and the son dropped his eyes. Gilbert could

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smell his son's after-shave lotion. He himself had never used the stuff in his life.

"I came to . . . I want to . . . Well. Your mother?"

"Yeah. Do you want a have lunch?"

"You mean dinner?"

The son flushed at the old-fashioned word. "Yeah. 'Dinner.' Go down the KFC and eat in the car."

"I come in the truck. Come on, let's go."

"I got a tell somebody I'm goin."

That's what it was like, thought Gilbert, working for somebody else. You had to tell them what you did or were going to do and they could say no.

He drove to the fast-food strip at the north end of town, shouted into the drive-through intercom. Sitting in the truck, the windows down and the hot sun burning their arms, they gnawed at the salty, overspiced chicken, huge crumbs falling. They both sucked on straws stuck into vanilla milkshakes.

"I tried a see her," said Gilbert. "She wouldn't see me."

"She's still pretty bitter, you know. Feels like her life was wasted, or at least some years of it. She's that way. She takes a position and that's it. You can't argue her out of nothin. She's stubborn."

"I know that pretty well. How's it affectin you that your mother is a crook and a jailbird?" He glanced sideways at Rod, seeing the pale, indoor complexion, the clerk's shirt with creases ironed into the sleeves. The boy had the heavy Wolfscale jaw and beaky nose.

"Hell, I don't know. I don't think of it that way. People look at me kind a funny but they don't say nothin. Except Deb. She is gettin a lot a snide comment down at the travel agency. It's no fun for her. It's my girls I worry about, if some kid at school this fall is goin a taunt them."

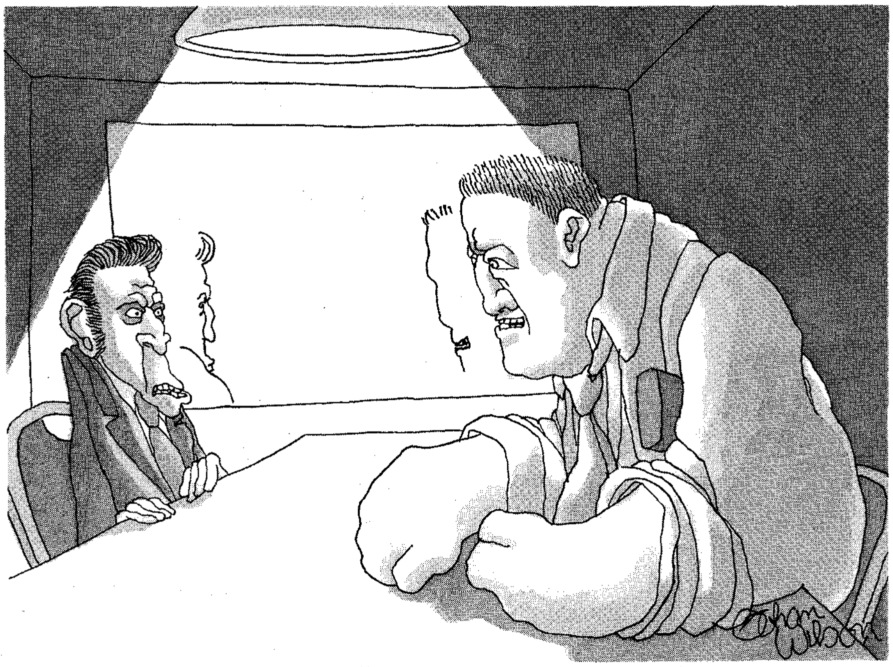
"Kids got short memories. By the time school starts they won't recall it. What do you think they'll do to her?"

"Probly go pretty light. She's got a good lawyer. You know, she made restitution of about twelve grand. That'll count for a lot. They already got a lien on the house, repossessed her car. That's what she used the most a the money for, buy the house and fix it up. That house was everthing to her. She put in a swimmin pool two years ago."

"I used a wonder how she could afford it. And I heard a couple years ago that she went out to Las Vegas?" He couldn't believe he'd found a packet of salt beneath the flabby biscuit. Did anyone ever think their chicken not salty enough?

"It was a whole bunch a them that work at the county offices. They all went. She won four thousand bucks."

For some reason this remark incensed Gilbert. Rod said it with a tone of pride that his lying, cheating, stealing, double-dealing mother had won some money gambling. He changed the subject abruptly. "What do you hear from your brother?"



"So where's the good cop?"

"Aw, he calls up now and then. We get together with him when we take Arlene down to Denver for her treatment. You know she's had that cancer. It's in remission now and you'd never know she'd been sick a day."

Gilbert did not know his granddaughter had been sick a day. He shuddered. In the distance he could hear a school marching band. Buffalo's parade was starting, or maybe just warming up.

"Is he still workin for that roofin contractor?"

"Well, no. He's workin in a restaurant. He's workin in a Jap restaurant. But he's healthy, thank God, considerin his—life style."

"What does that mean, his 'life style'?" Gilbert wiped his hands of the chicken, wadded the napkin, and thrust it into the grease-stained box.

"Well, he's—you know."

"I know what?"

"Dad, it's not up to me to say nothin about Monty." Rod was folding and crushing the box. He wiped his right hand on his pants leg.

"I ain't heard or seen him for quite a few years. Not likely to. Now what the hell is this about his 'life style'?"

"For Christ sake, Dad. It's nothin. Just he's sort a—more—sophisticated. He likes a different kind a stuff than most people come from Wyomin."

"I hear you talkin but I don't know what you're sayin."

But he did. As a child Monty had hung around the kitchen and his mother constantly, and to get him to help with chores had been more labor than doing the jobs himself. That is, until Myrl Otter came to work on the ranch on weekends. Myrl was a big blond Scandinavian type, muscular and good-looking. The man's wife had her work cut out for her keeping an eye on him, as girls flirted with Myrl and he reciprocated willingly. After he came to work on the ranch Monty began to tag after the fellow like a yellowjacket after pears. Gilbert noticed, but as the boy was only seven or eight it seemed just a little kid's fancy, nothing much. Kids got attached to dogs and blankets and maybe even hired men. He thought nothing of it and after a few months Myrl Otter, in the way of so many ranch hands, stopped

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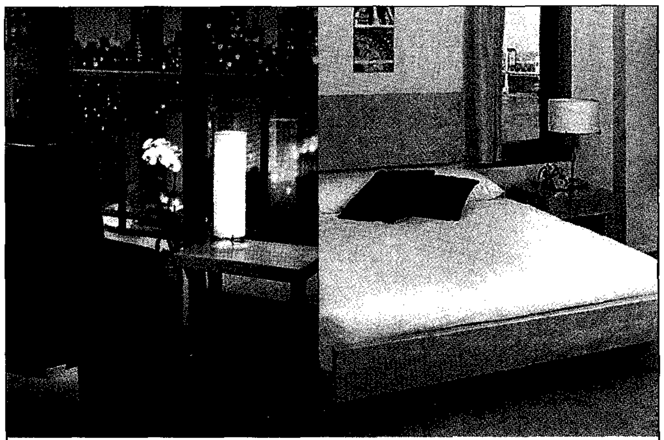

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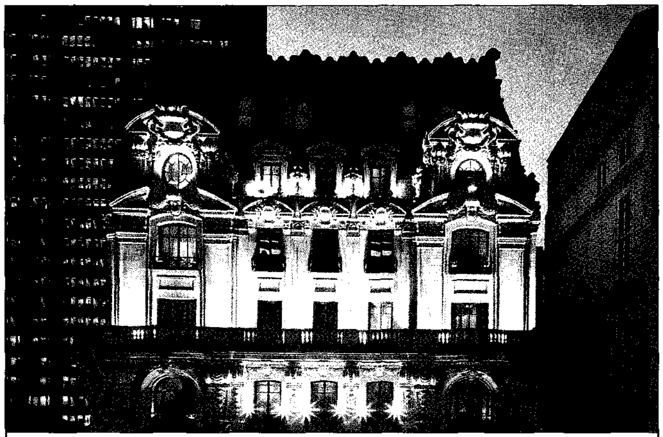

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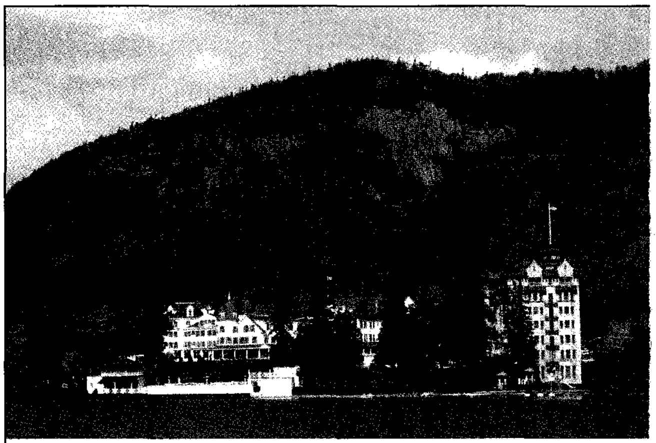

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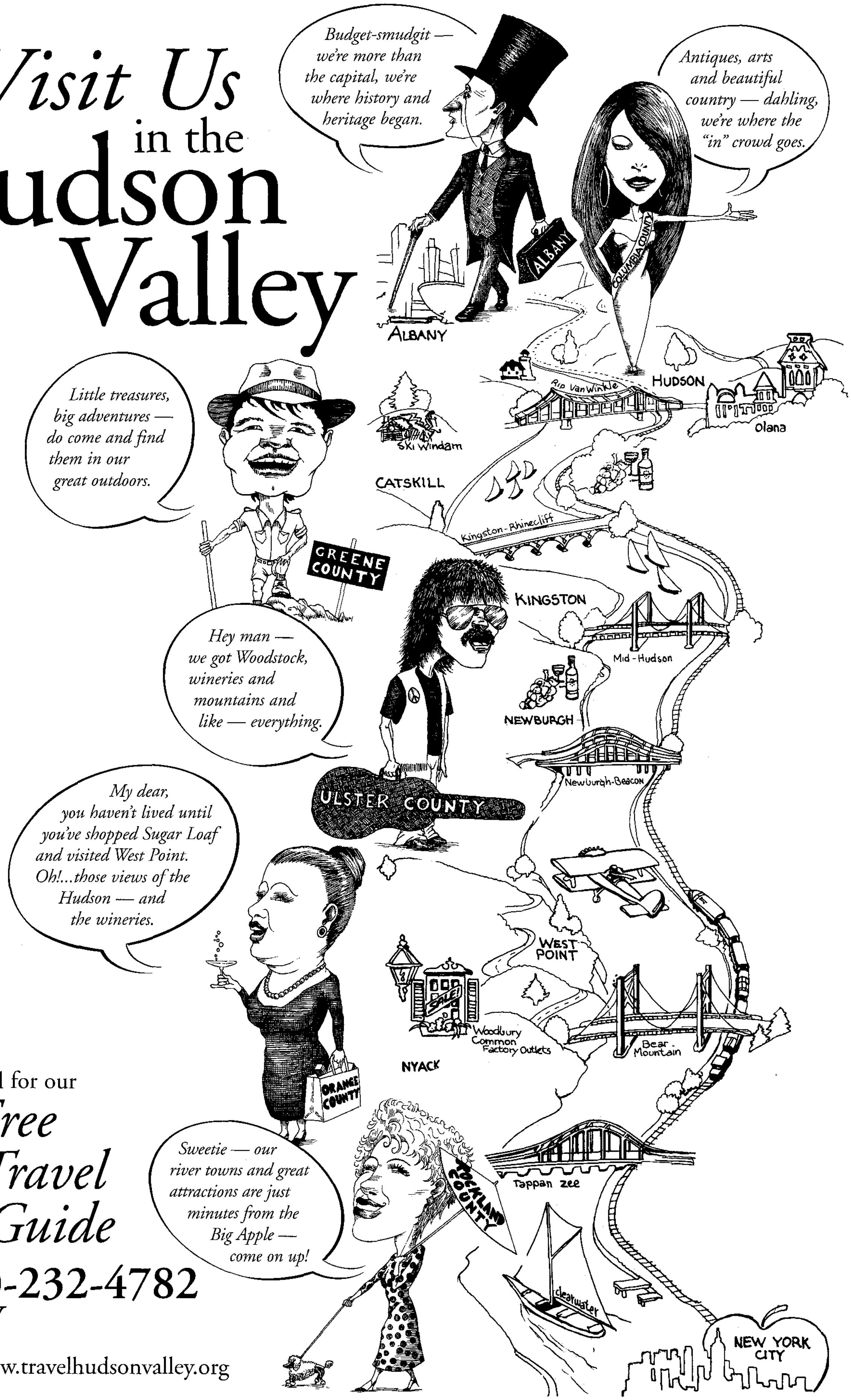
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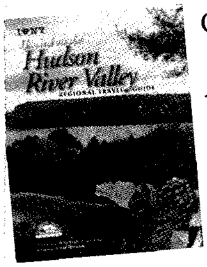
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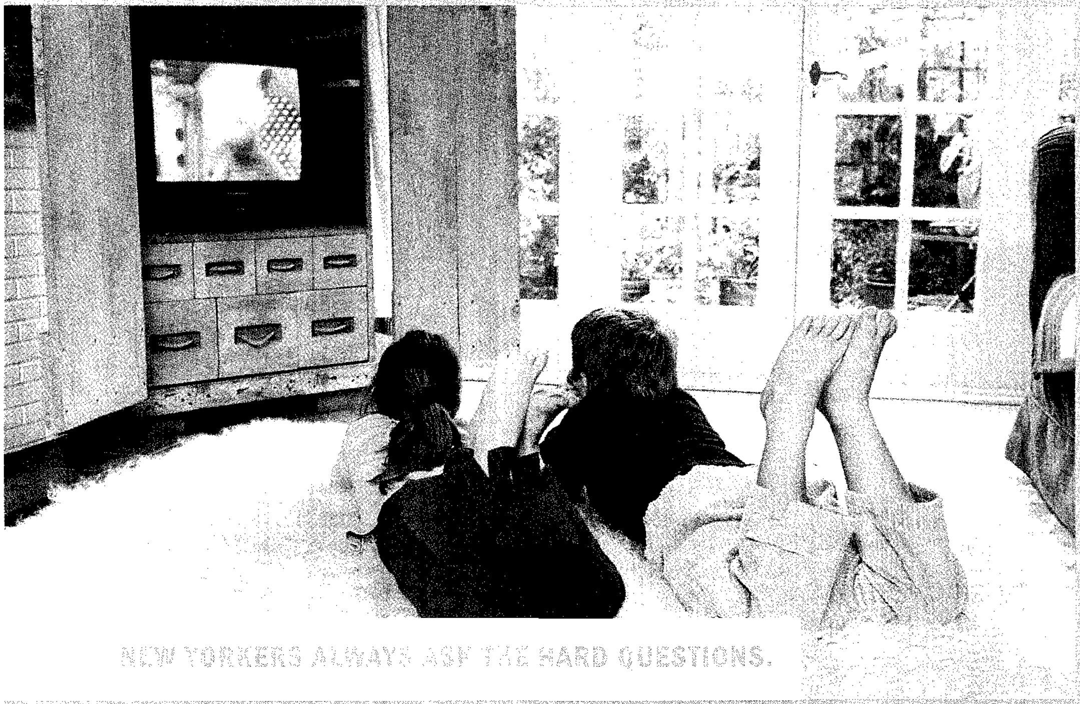

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showing up for work and Gilbert had forgotten him until now. The marching music, carried by the light wind, seemed nearer.

"I better get goin. Don't want a get tied up in that damn parade." He got out, threw his chicken box at the trash can. Rod, too, tossed his crumpled box, but it hit the side of the can and sprayed chicken bones.

"Forget it," said Gilbert. "They get paid a pick up."

He dropped Rod back at the video store and headed north, thinking to beat the parade by taking a side street, but he was too late. He stopped for a red light that wouldn't change and the parade came surging around a corner, passing in front of him, and he had to wait. A section of the high-school band straggled past, sweaty kids, many of them obese, their white marching trousers bunched at the crotch. He remembered schoolmates in his own childhood, skinny, quick ranch kids, no one fat and sweaty, Pete Kitchen looking like he was made of kindling wood and insulation wire, Willis McNitt small enough to shit behind a sagebrush and never be noticed.

Behind the band came two teen-age boys dressed as Indians, breechclouts over swim trunks, a load of beads around their necks, black wigs with braids and feathers. One carried a bongo drum, striking it irregularly with his hand. Their skin had been darkened with some streaky substance. Then two men whom he recognized as Sheridan car mechanics slouched along in buckskin suits and fur hats, carrying antique flintlocks. One had a demijohn that he lifted to his lips every thirty seconds, crying "Yee-haw!" The other had a few shiny No. 2 traps over his shoulder. Gilbert could see the hardware-store price tags on them. He knew he was going to get the whole hokey Wild West treatment before he could move.

Now came two horses, both bearing kids dressed as cowboys, in heavy woolly chaps, pearl-button Western shirts, limp bandannas, big hats, and boots. Both twirled guns on their fingers, aiming at friends in the crowd. They were followed by a stock outlaw and a sheriff's posse, and behind them half the town's women and small children in pioneer regalia—long calico dresses, aprons and sunbonnets, big Nikes flashing incongruously with every step. One of these women was Patty Codenhead and for a moment he was startled at how much she looked like the photograph of his father's mother in the china cupboard. It was the costume, he thought. The parade came down to a few trick riders in neon satin, and Sedley Alwen, who, crazy or not, was in every public procession showing off his roping skills, stepping in and out of his fluid loops and somehow avoiding the horse manure that marked the path. The last of all was a CPC pickup, three hard-hatted methane-gas workers sitting in back smoking cigarettes and joking with each other. Now he could go.

He could go but he found it difficult to step on the accelerator. The light turned green, red, then green again, yet he couldn't move until drivers behind him began to sound their horns. There had been something wrong with the parade, something seriously wrong, but he couldn't think what.

Driving through the open country on the way back, he forgot the parade and thought about Monty and what form his "sophistication" might take, about his embezzling wife, the other son who had not bothered to tell him that his grandchild had cancer. He couldn't tell the size of things. He was very thirsty and blamed the salty chicken.

The buildings and traffic fell away and he was on the empty road, the dusty sage flying past, the white ground. The sky was a hard cheerful blue, empty but for a few torn contrails. Plastic bags impaled on the barb fences flapped in the hot wind. A small herd of pronghorn in the distance had their heads down. He saw his neighbor's cattle spread out on the parched land and it came to him that there had been no ranchers in the parade—it was all pioneers, outlaws, Indians, and gas.

He knew what kind of furniture Jesus would pick for his place in Wyoming. He would choose a few small pines in the National Forest, go there at night, fell and limb them, debark the sappy rind with a spud, exposing the pale, worm-tunnelled wood, and from the timbers he would make the simplest round-legged furniture, everything pegged, no nails or screws.

He wished his mother were still alive. He'd say to her, "One thing sure. He wouldn't get hisself tangled up with no ranch." It didn't come close to saying what he meant but it was all he could do. ◆

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LITTLE PEOPLE

When did we start treating children like children?

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

A good deal of our intellectual life in the past half century has been ruled by the following pattern: First, a French person, with great brilliance and little regard for standards of evidence, promulgates a theory overturning dearly held beliefs. Second, many academics, especially the young, seize on the theory and run with it, in the process loading it with far more emotional and political freight than the French thinker—who, after all, was just "doing theory"—had in mind. Meanwhile, other scholars indignantly reaffirm the pre-revisionist view, and everyone calls for more research, to decide the question. In the third stage, the research is produced, and it confuses everybody, because it is too particular, too respectful of variation and complexity, to support either the nice old theory or the naughty new one.

Recent histories of the family have followed this itinerary. For years, people believed that the family had been the basis of society from ancient times and that only modern liberal ideas had shaken it. Then, in 1960, the French social historian Philippe Ariès produced a book, "Centuries of Childhood," arguing that for most of history what we call the family—above all, what we call childhood—did not exist, and that only modern liberal ideas created it. According to Ariès, medieval children joined the world of adults from the moment they were weaned, and no one made a fuss about how little and cute they were. In the seventeenth century, however, this system was overthrown. Children gradually came to be seen as creatures of a different order from adults: innocent, fragile, temptable, and therefore in need of molding. Thus came compulsory schooling, which isolated them from the world. At home, they were again sequestered, in what became the increasingly small, self-involved unit of the nuclear family.

Ariès did not approve of this development. The pictures of the premodern family suggested by his book—father drinking beer with the neighbors, mother at the spinning wheel, grandmother stoking the fire, one child hanging on her skirts, another peeing in a corner or chasing a pig, maidservants flirting with apprentices—are full of Bruegelesque life and variety, tumble and zest. The "discovery of childhood," Ariès says, deprived the child of all that and "inflicted on him the birch, the prison cell—in a word, the punishments usually reserved for convicts." At the same time, children became the objects of "obsessive love," together with incessant demands for conformity to a family ideal. The Europeans became the Portnoys.

Ariès's book was translated into English in 1962, and by the seventies many scholars were writing about the "discovery of childhood," without sharing their French colleague's regrets about it. Amid the politics of the period, any discovery of childhood looked like a good thing. Edward Shorter, in his "Making of the Modern Family" (1975), deplored the "ghastly slaughter of the innocents" that in his view constituted child care in the old days. Lawrence Stone, the author of "The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800" (1977), claimed that the conditions of premodern childhood "created an adult world of emotional cripples, whose primary responses to others were at best a calculating indifference." These men placed the turning point in the eighteenth century rather than the seventeenth, but they, too, felt that the European family eventually underwent a "revolution in sentiment."

In opposition to this so-called sentimentalist school, a "continuity" school reared its aggrieved head. According to Steven Ozment, a continuity theorist, no revolution in sentiment ever occurred, or needed to; there had been a culture of childhood ever since there were documentable children. And so, while Shorter's premodern children were being slaughtered and Stone's crippled, Ozment's—as described in his book "Ancestors" (2001)—were "playing marbles, shooting dice, jumping rope, flying kites, dragging tame birds and reluctant beetles about on strings." Many people, including the disputants, called for more research. "There is little doubt," Stone wrote in 1974, "that in ten years time the picture will be much clearer, and that all of us who have ventured to advance theories about this subject will have been proved wrong."

They were, sort of. The dispute did generate a vast amount of research, which is now being synthesized in Yale's "The History of the European Family." The first volume, "Family Life in Early Modern Times, 1500-1789" ($35), came out in 2001. The second, "Family Life in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1789-1913" ($35), was published this past spring. The final volume, on the twentieth century, is due in January. This series is a huge enterprise, with essays by twenty-nine scholars summarizing recent findings on marriage, divorce, child-rearing, kinship groups, and on and on. But it's not as though the picture has become clearer. Many of the theory-wielders—Ariès above all—had been casual about standards of evidence. The researchers who came after them were much more responsible. They didn't rely heavily on personal documents such as letters and diaries, because such evidence tells us only about the small minority of people (mostly moneyed, mostly male) who, in this stretch of time, could write. They

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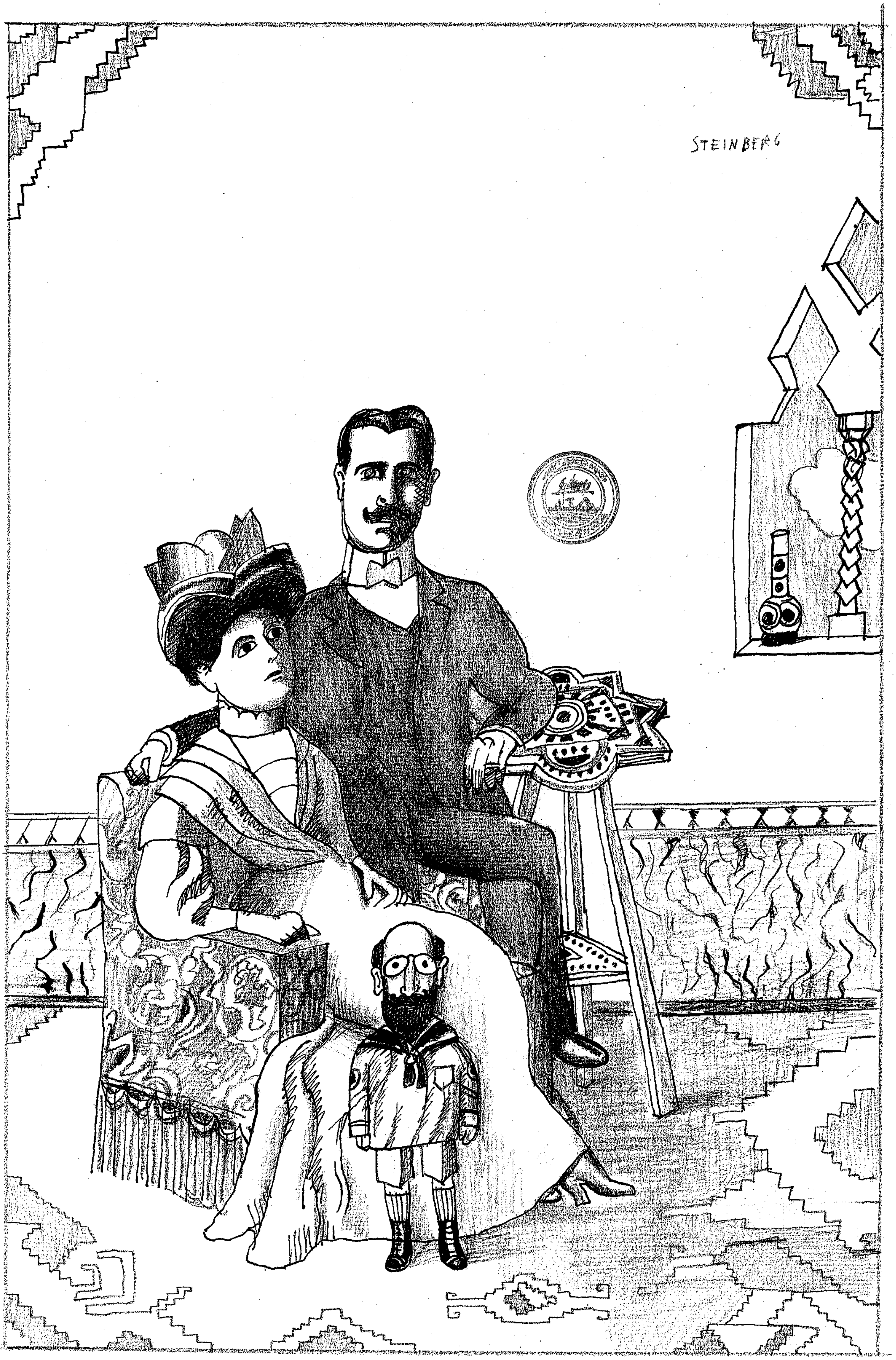
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didn't look at paintings, because paintings are made by artists, who have their own notions. They concentrated on more objective, and hence more representative, sources: wills, inventories, tax rolls. But, as Ozment has pointed out, the more representative a source, the more shallow and impersonal the information it conveys. You have your choice, he said: "deep interpretation" or "deep sourcing." The Yale books, from top to bottom, are deep sourcing, and therefore, while the editors, David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli, claim that their findings support the continuity hypothesis, that is true only because the thing the writers report again and again—variation, difference—is bound to yield some evidence for continuity, as well as for everything else.

Add to this the tight-lipped manner of the writing—in reaction to their flamethrowing predecessors, most of the contributors eschew politics, moralizing, sentiment of any kind—and the result is a pretty dry set of books. On the rare occasion when the authors quote a real seventeenth-century person, or peek into an actual eighteenth-century parlor, one feels like bursting into tears of gratitude. Kertzer and Barbagli say that their intent is to make recent findings on the family "available to a broad public." I do not think they will get their wish. If you are not a social scientist, you don't have to read these books. I did it for you. Here are the good parts.

From the late Middle Ages until the the sixteenth century, it was much easier to get married than it is today. You did not need your parents' approval, or the blessing of church or state, or even witnesses. If you were of age—fourteen for boys, twelve for girls—and if you either exchanged words of mutual consent in the present tense ("I take thee as my husband," "I take thee as my wife") or exchanged promises of future consent ("I will take thee," etc.) and then had sexual intercourse, you were married, until death, in the eyes of Catholic Europe. Once the Protestants took over in the northern countries, they required parental permission—Rome, too, tightened its rules—but well after the Reformation children were still challenging their parents' wishes. (This was a constant theme of comic literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Think of Molière, or "Tom Jones.") The poorer you were, the more choice you had in picking a mate. It was the daughters of the nobility who tended to find themselves married in their teens to some rich old fellow of their parents' choosing.

If the young people of Western Europe married more freely than we generally assume, they were also more likely to establish their own households. Modern moralists often complain of how much we lost in the presumably recent transition from large, warm extended families to the small, shivering nuclear families of today. In fact, those extended families were the rule only in Eastern Europe, where the serfs were actually forbidden to break up into smaller households, as this was thought to weaken the labor force. In Western Europe, whether you lived in a small or an extended household depended mainly on how you made your living—how many hands you needed—but it turns out that modern sentiments regarding in-laws are not so modern after all (old Italian saying: "Mothers-in-law are fine, especially when they're underground"), and the drift toward limiting the household to mother, father, and unmarried children, with maybe a grandmother thrown in, goes back as far as the Middle Ages.

But the family was even smaller than that, because in many cases its adolescent children were gone, doing what is known as "life-cycle service"—that is, working as domestic servants (girls) or as apprentices or farmhands (boys)—in other people's houses before returning home to get married. As late as the nineteenth century, seventy-five per cent of boys and fifty per cent of girls in northwestern Europe were in service. The majority went no more than five miles from home, but others travelled farther. In the Yale series, Loftur Guttormsson, of the University of Iceland, quotes one of his countrymen, born in 1883, describing the leave-taking: "Now came the last opportunity to turn around and see my mother, where she remained standing on the rock Snös. I was twelve years old and the fifth child she had to send away from home into the unknown." Most of the children left between the ages of ten and fifteen and stayed away for perhaps five years. Even upper-class children went into service—with families that were more upper class—to perfect their manners and extend their patronage networks. If, as is said, adolescence wasn't discovered until the twentieth century, that may be because earlier teen-agers didn't have time for one, or, if they did, it wasn't witnessed by their parents.

Of course, teen-agers weren't the only ones who had jobs. Before the introduction of compulsory education, most European children worked, starting around the age of seven. If they lived on farms, they tended sheep, gathered firewood. If their family had a home workshop, they carded wool, spun cotton. Their tasks were graded to their ages; it wasn't until the rise of the factories that the real Dickensian grind set in. But I note in the Yale series a certain revisionism regarding child labor, even in the factories. Guttormsson points out that many children had older brothers and sisters on the shop floor—which gave them a measure of protection—and that their work was often a source of pride to them. They regarded schoolboys as pantywaists. Furthermore, once the child-labor laws came in, starting around 1880, working children didn't get to go play; they, too, were sent to school. In the process, Guttormsson says, they lost their independence and their street smarts. Meanwhile, their parents were left with a hole in the family budget.

For anyone trying to square the habits of the old days with the sentiments of the new, the fact that children worked is a small matter compared with the rate at which they died. The period of highest risk was the first year of life, and the prime culprit was wet-nursing. Until quite recently, most Europeans believed that breast-feeding destroyed the shape of a woman's breasts, that it was damaging to her health, that it prevented her from having sexual relations (sex was thought to corrupt breast milk), and that it was a low-class thing to do. As for low-class women, many of them didn't want to nurse, either, and their work often precluded it. Some resorted to animal milk—which, before Pasteur, was the biggest baby-killer of all—but most used wet nurses. Rich families might move the wet nurse into their house, but most babies were sent to the wet nurse's house, usually in the country, where, depending on the conditions prevailing in her cottage, they stood a good chance of dying. In eighteenth-century France, the general mortality rate before the age of one was sixteen to eighteen per cent, but for children sent away to wet-nurse it was fifty to sixty-six per cent.

By this time, however, the French had children to spare. It is in the eighteenth century that we start to see the spread of birth control, which, for the most part, seems to have been coitus interruptus. (Condoms existed in the seventeenth century, but people didn't trust them as contraceptives, and until the development of vulcanized rubber, in 1844, their worries were probably well founded. Men used condoms with prostitutes, as a protection against venereal disease.) But the trend moved slowly. Meanwhile, countertrends caused the population of Europe to double between 1750 and 1850. Above all, there was a huge rise in illegitimate births. By 1850, half the children born in Vienna and Stockholm, and one-third in Paris, were illegitimate. Who managed to keep their daughters intact? The Calvinists in the Netherlands, the Muslims in the Balkans, the Catholics in Ireland and many southern regions, and the Jews throughout Europe. For the rest, especially in the cities, there seems to have been a free-for-all. Many of the couples in question were engaged to be married, which, once the girl got pregnant, they swiftly did. As researchers have discovered from parish registers (all you have to do is compare the marriage date with the date of the first child's baptism), thirty-seven per cent of English brides in the late eighteenth century, and half in the early nineteenth century, went to the altar pregnant.

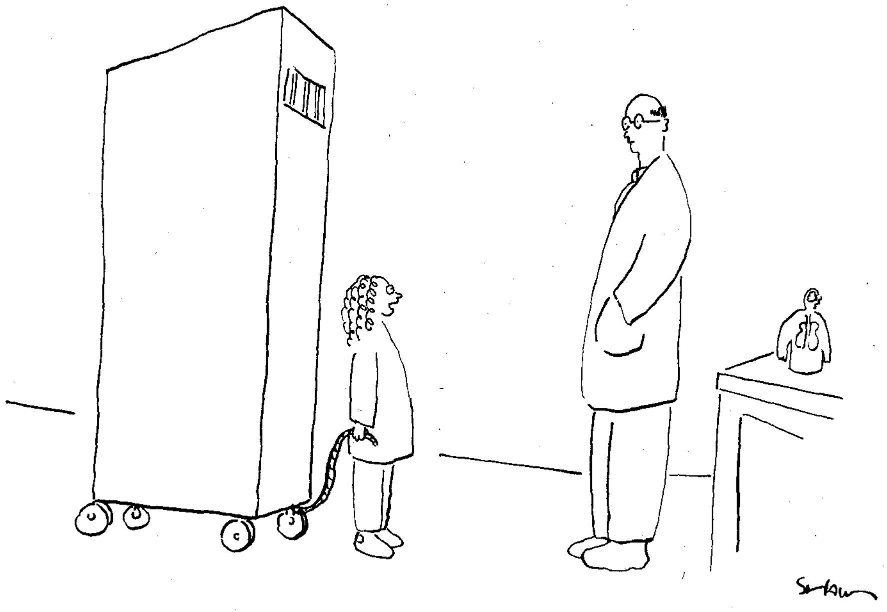
As for those women who did not have fiancés, some tried to abort, the most popular method being to swallow several dozen phosphorus match heads—a practice so widespread and so dangerous that Germany outlawed the sale of phosphorus matches in 1907. Other women killed their newborns. I remember, during the "discovery of childhood" craze of the seventies, reading that infanticide was common in the old days. The authors of the Yale series say that it was rare. Rachel Fuchs, of Arizona State University, writes that women who committed infanticide in the nineteenth century "were generally young, single domestic servants . . . alone and lacking family support, filled with shame, afraid to dishonor themselves and their families, and abandoned by their lovers." Some who were prosecuted claimed that they had acted out of temporary insanity. That was the case with their great literary counterpart, Goethe's Gretchen. Her insanity did not go away, however. At the end of "Faust," Part I, the hero, having seduced Gretchen and left her, deigns to visit her in prison, where she has been locked up for drowning their baby. Hallucinating back to her crime, she begs him to save the baby:

Quick! Quick! I pray. . . .
On! Follow the way
Along the brook,
Over the bridge. . .
Seize it—oh, quick!
It wants to rise,
It is still struggling.
Save! Save!

This is one of the most painful scenes in Western literature.

To protect girls from such a fate, foundling hospitals were established in the thirteenth century, in Italy, and they soon opened throughout Catholic Europe. Protestant countries, for the most part, did not have them, because Protestants believed that people who engendered bastards should not ask the state to raise them. Catholics, on the other hand, were concerned to restore the mother's honor, and her family's. The typical foundling home had a "turning-cradle," or lazy Susan, set into one of its exterior walls. If you were dropping off a baby, you slunk to the turning-cradle in the dark of night, laid the bundle on it, turned the contraption, and rang a bell to alert those inside. The baby thereupon became the hospital's. The stated purpose of the foundling hospitals was to prevent infanticide, but, as Fuchs points out, they were actually in the business of "culturally sanctioned infanticide." All the babies were sent out to wet nurses, and the great majority died.

Nevertheless, foundling homes were the most heavily used form of public charity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the man whose writings, more than those of any other European, gave rise to the modern, tender view of children, consigned all five of his offspring to foundling homes. (He tried to find them later, but couldn't.) In the mid-nineteenth century, one-third of all babies born in Milan and Florence, and one-half in Vienna, were turned over to institutions. Reformers said that something had to be done, and so the turning-cradle was abolished. To deposit a child at a



"The title of my science project is 'My Little Brother: Nature or Nurture.'"

foundling hospital, you now had to walk through the front door and give your name. This led to a decline in admissions, but not necessarily in abandonment; many mothers, it seems, just left the babies in the streets. Nor, after the beginning of the population explosion, were the majority of child-abandoners trying to escape the stigma of illegitimacy. Half the children turned over to the Inclusa hospital in Madrid in the mid-eighteenth century, and *three-quarters* of those left at the Spedale degli Innocenti in Florence in the late eighteenth century, were legitimate. The prime cause was poverty. As bread prices rose, so did the traffic at the foundling home.

While disposing of your child was easy, getting rid of your spouse was next to impossible. We tend to thank the Protestants for introducing divorce to Western Europe, but they did so only because they were intensely serious about the institution of marriage and did not want to see it sullied by scandalous failures. To qualify as such, your marriage had to be very bad. In most jurisdictions, adultery was not sufficient ground, nor was aggravated assault. The records of Geneva's diocesan court for 1542 offer an example. The court "convoked a lumberjack who had beaten his wife so severely that he put out one of her eyes." The judges "admonished the man to be more gentle with his wife but also ordered the woman to obey . . . her husband and not to provoke him. At no point was divorce even mentioned as a possible solution." In keeping with such standards, the divorce rate never rose to even one per thousand residents in any Protestant state in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. The first liberal divorce law—and it was extremely liberal, similar to our no-fault divorce—was enacted only at the end of the eighteenth century, and it was the work not of Protestants but of Catholics, the legislators of the French Revolution. This law was passed in 1792, but already by 1804, with the introduction of the Napoleonic *code civil*, various impediments were restored, and, after the Bourbon restoration, in 1814, divorce once again became very hard to get until the final decades of the nineteenth century. The same held true in most of the rest of Western Europe.

Almost everywhere, women had greater difficulty than men in dissolving their marriages. When England liberalized its divorce laws in 1857, a man could get a divorce on the ground of adultery, but for a woman to use the same argument she had to show that her husband's crime was compounded by incest, bigamy, rape, sodomy, or bestiality. In post-Revolutionary France, the woman didn't have to prove that, but she did have to establish that her husband did the deed in the marital home. The laws governing paternity suits involved the same curious provisos. In France in 1912, the mother of an illegitimate child gained the right to sue the putative father for child support, but only if he was not married.

"Nothing human is alien to me," said Terence, but do we actually feel that way? Insofar as we don't—insofar, say, as we are bewildered to find half the newborns in Vienna in 1850 being abandoned—we are likely to construct theories that human nature has changed. In a way, it's just a matter of surprisability. For Ariès, a crucial change was the development of the notion that children should be sexually innocent. This belief did not exist in the early seventeenth century, he says, and with his usual blithe approach to evidence he offers as his modal child the Dauphin of France, as described in the diary of his doctor. "Louis XIII was not yet one year old: 'He laughed uproariously when his nanny waggled his cock with her fingers.' An amusing trick which the child soon copied. Calling a page, 'he shouted, "Hey, there!" and pulled up his robe, showing him his cock.' " Soon, the little devil was exposing himself to anyone who walked through the door. "No other document," Ariès writes, "can give us a better idea of the non-existence of the modern idea of childhood at the beginning of the seventeenth century."

Really? I grant that the doctor's notes reveal one important change: today, the nanny would be arrested. But, as for the child's behavior, it would cause no comment in my neighborhood. If this is what Ariès thinks of a little boy pulling down his pants, what does he think of foundling homes? (In fact, he does not discuss them, perhaps because their admissions peaked at exactly the time when, according to his schema, sentimental views of childhood were cresting.)

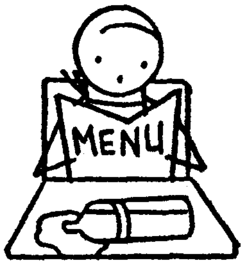
Now consider the opposite approach: unsurprisability, "historicism," the view that nothing in the past is alien. That is the position taken by the writers in the Yale series. Recall Fuchs's poignant portrait of the infanticidal mother. She also defends the child-abandoners—"mothers in dire circumstances, with no alternatives." (She might have added that it is easy for people who have artificial birth control and legal abortion to deplore child abandonment.) Such historical empathy leads naturally to the continuity argument. According to Linda A. Pollock, of Tulane University, the fact that premodern parents wielded absolute authority over their children (including the right to beat them), failed to regard them as individuals, and had an economic interest in them—three conditions that the sentimentalist school says preclude any notion of childhood comparable to our own—doesn't mean they didn't love them. As Pollock sees it, we shouldn't even be inquiring whether parental love existed in the old days; we should just be asking "what love meant" in any given time and place. Maybe so, but the farther I go down this road with the Yale authors the more I start gasping for air. In recent times, Pollock writes, "the definition of love may have changed: from an absence of ill-feeling to doing all one could for a person." An absence of ill-feeling? We call this love? That, finally, is where historicism takes us—to a collapse of language.

But we don't have to go all the way down the road with any of these writers. People now say that "mind" and "brain" are two words for the same thing. That may be true also of continuity and sentimentalist theory—that they are just shifts in the angle of vision. Indeed, it may be true of theory and research. Research chastens our thoughts, forces us to be responsible about them, but without theory we probably wouldn't have any thoughts. We seem to need the excitement, the irritation of that too confident idea. Ariès's "Centuries of Childhood" is a superb performance, a worthy cause of battle. The other theoretical books that followed—Shorter's, Stone's, Ozment's—are also vivid, forceful arguments. These writers, you feel, may have had children. The Yale books are something altogether different, though they are no doubt more true. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

In the Name of Ishmael, *by Giuseppe Genna, translated from the Italian by Ann Goldstein* (*Miramax; $25*). This baroque thriller, set in a Milan where mist seems to continually pour from the ground, opens with two apparently unconnected events: the discovery of a murdered child, buried under a war memorial, at the height of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962; and, almost four decades later, the shooting of a man in the street on the eve of an international political conference. Chapters shift between the two detectives pursuing the investigations. The tortuous plot—involving sadomasochistic clubs, fringe sects, and assassins—hinges on the historical figure of Enrico Mattei, an Italian industrialist who died in a plane crash in 1962 under suspicious circumstances. The author, a poet and journalist, writes with jittery, propulsive energy, and he can stop the reader cold with a single image, as when he describes, at the crash site of Mattei's plane, the unbroken, blood-stained trees.

In Times of Siege, *by Githa Hariharan* (*Pantheon; $22*). When a middle-aged history professor at a New Delhi university writes about Basava, a medieval poet, administrator, and reformer who opposed the caste system, he unwittingly provokes protests from Hindu fundamentalists that threaten his career. If this premise seems to be drawn from the headlines of modern, B.J.P.-dominated India, Hariharan amplifies the themes of courage, dissent, and responsibility in her protagonist's private life. He becomes attracted to a student activist while his wife is overseas, and he confronts the memory of his father, a freedom fighter who disappeared when his son was fifteen. The result is an engaging portrait of the mild-mannered professor, who, even as the crisis engulfs him, marvels that his scholarly discipline "has become a live, fiery thing."



Marianne in Chains, *by Robert Gildea* (*Metropolitan; $32.50*). After the Liberation of France, the Resistance was glorified and collaborators punished, but these convenient categories obscured the varied and equivocal experience of the ordinary populace. To capture this experience, Gildea concentrates on one region, the Loire, going deep into its archives and interviewing survivors. He describes the blurry line between civility and collaboration—drinking with Germans in a café was acceptable; inviting them home was not—and citizens' confusion about where their patriotic duty lay. Typically, people defined their loyalty within their immediate community, which explains their willingness to betray Communists and Jews, but also the lasting bitterness toward the Resistance for the reprisals its attacks on Germans provoked. In terms that would doubtless seem familiar to the inhabitants of other occupied countries, this subtle and humane book shows that the French experience of occupation was one of comfort, deprivation, heroism, pettiness, terror, excitement, pride, and shame.

Kodachrome, *edited by Els Rijper* (*Delano Greenidge; $29.95*). Although commercial color film was first produced in 1907, it was not widely used until the mid-nineteen-fifties, so when we think of people and events from the first half of the twentieth century we tend to imagine them in black-and-white. In fact, from the mid-thirties Kodak's Kodachrome process offered a remarkably colorfast and permanent image. The stunning pictures in this book show subjects familiar from black-and-white photography—Georgia sharecroppers, New York City traffic beneath the Third Avenue El, Hugo Jaeger's Nazi Berlin—but invigorated by a vivid palette that makes them feel startlingly contemporary. Unfortunately, Kodak, worried about losing business for its other, less stable color stocks, never made Kodachrome's superior durability a public selling point, and so the corpus of surviving color images is smaller than it might have been.

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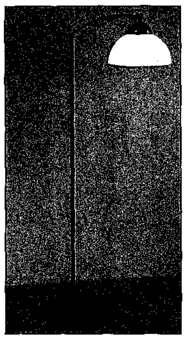

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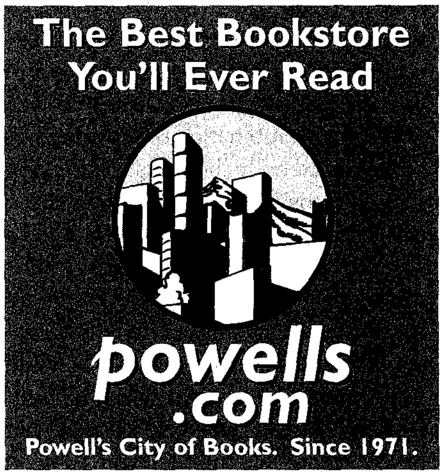
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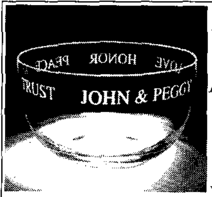

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ON TELEVISION

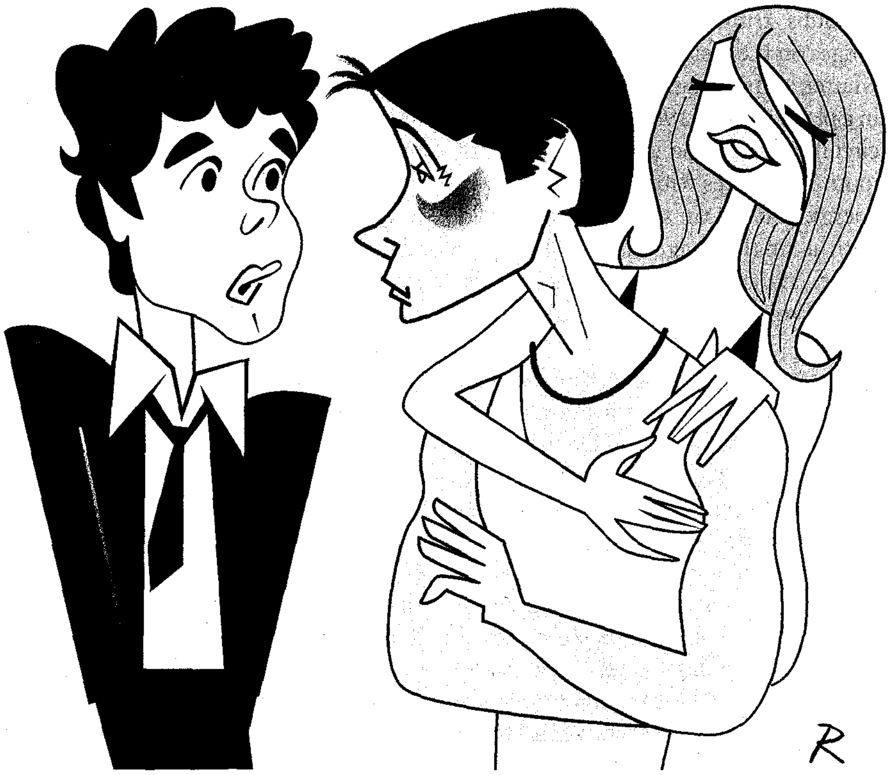
SUNNY MONEY

Fox heads down the coast from 90210.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

In the pilot episode of Fox's heavily promoted new drama "The O.C.," which débuted last week, getting a jump on the rest of the network's baseball-delayed fall season, a teen-age girl who's standing at the bottom of her driveway in a gated enclave waiting for a ride spots a new boy in town, standing at the next driveway over. A winning combination of sensitive eyes and muscled body (he looks like a young Russell Crowe), he piques her interest, causing her to ask, "Who are you?" As a cigarette dangling from his mouth bobbles up and down, he says, "Whoever you want me to be." This answer-that-isn't-an-answer evokes the Brando of "The Wild One," who, when asked what he is rebelling against, insolently says, "What have you got?," but this boy, Ryan Atwood (Benjamin McKenzie), is closer to James Dean's troubled teen-ager in "Rebel Without a Cause," who wants only to be understood and to fit in. (Before the pilot is half over, Ryan is seen in a jacket and tie.)

Set in the moneyed coastal paradise of Newport Beach, "The O.C."—the title refers to Orange County, the largely suburban, affluent, Republican county between Los Angeles and San Diego, and the home of Disneyland and John Wayne Airport—in some ways tries to fill the space occupied by two departed Fox series of the nineties, "Melrose Place" and "Beverly Hills 90210," which in the one case invited us to make fun of its characters and in the other knew we were inclined to make fun of them but asked us to withhold judgment because, after all, they were just kids. "The O.C." means to show us that, difficult as it may be for the misfit Ryan, a poor kid from a broken family, to make his way in this exclusive place, with its cutthroat attitude toward outsiders, life can be just as demanding, and even as frightening, for the insiders. (It's not easy having green.) While on one level this is laughable—all you need to know about a gated community, it could be argued, is that there is a gate—"The O.C." has a seductive quality. It works on you a little like the drive Ryan takes near the beginning of the pilot. Having had a brush with the law—his older brother ropes him into stealing a car, and he's thrown out of the house by his mother—he is befriended by a public defender, Sandy Cohen (Peter Gallagher), who takes him home to his family. As Sandy drives, we leave behind a world of harsh heat, concrete, and graffiti and head up the coast, passing surfers and young men playing touch football on the beach in the orangey-pink light of a summer afternoon. This, you have to admit, looks pretty enticing.



Adam Brody, Benjamin McKenzie, and Mischa Barton in "The O.C."

Sandy himself was a poor kid from the Bronx, whose father wasn't around (Ryan's father is in jail for armed robbery), and he sees himself in Ryan. His wife, Kirsten (Kelly Rowan), however, is alarmed at the prospect of a juvenile delinquent—even one with near-perfect test scores—sharing their house and coming into contact with their teen-age son, but she relents, and lets him stay in the pool house. ("Pool house": two words that could make almost everyone who has ever lived feel like a misfit.) As it happens, Ryan and the Cohens' son, Seth (Adam Brody), a misfit of a different sort—full of boyish technical know-how but socially awkward, he is the kind of person who at a party hangs around the beer keg to adjust the pressure valve—hit it off; they play video games and go sailing on Seth's catamaran. (Brody is really too good-looking to be playing an unpopular kid, but he makes it work; he talks too much and too fast, he mumbles, and he projects zero physical confidence. In short, his character is adorable—except to people his own age.) It's Sandy's wife who has the money—she grew up here, and she works for her father, a rich real-estate developer. They live next door to Jimmy (Tate Donovan), a high-school flame of Kirsten's, and his social-climber wife, Julie (Melinda Clarke), who is from downscale Riverside and would like very much to forget it. Their California dream is on its way to being a nightmare: Jimmy, a businessman who has botched a couple of deals, has a severe case of financial flop sweat, which his wife doesn't want to know about. She's concerned with appearances, not with reality. Standing before a mirror, she checks out her water-balloon cleavage and other assets as she preps for a party. When her daughter Marissa (Mischa Barton)—the girl at the bottom of the driveway—appears, a portrait of teen-age physical perfection, Julie, who sees her only as a measure of her own currency, finds something to criticize: “Oh, honey—I thought you were going to wear your hair down. Pulled back like that it’s a little too harsh on your angles.” Therapists, start your engines.

There is hardly a scene or a situation in the first three episodes of “The O.C.” that you don’t see coming: Ryan’s mother’s tacky dishevelment when we meet her (her sweatshirt is half on, half off; her bra strap has fallen down her arm, and it’s an unsubtle purple) predicts a later, embarrassingly public meltdown; Marissa’s lighting a cigarette from Ryan’s in the driveway scene foreshadows—well, you know what it foreshadows. But the series’ executive producers—Josh Schwartz, who created “The O.C.”; Doug Liman, who directed the movie “Swingers” and the show’s pilot; and McG, who directed the two “Charlie’s Angels” movies—have cast the show well, with actors who hint with almost every movement and word at the anxiety that underlay their characters’ drive to get to this charmed place and their desire to stay there. (Tate Donovan’s Jimmy, in particular, shows the cost of trying to keep a foothold on the slippery slope of wealth; his nervous smile becomes more compulsive and frantic as he falls apart.) And there are nice little surprises: the sudden loud sound of a backpack being zipped, signalling a sad but inevitable goodbye. The show emphasizes the unrelenting brightness of the California light, and even the pretty beach tableau at the beginning of the pilot makes you shield your eyes. Although “The O.C.” isn’t set in the world of show business, it has some of the cautionary rumbling undertones you feel in movies and TV shows about the empty promises of Hollywood. Here, too, just a few miles down the road, in the land of endless summer, everyone, no matter where he comes from, is in danger of flying too close to the sun.

During the week of August 18th, viewers will have two very different opportunities to return to the nineteen-seventies. Beginning on August 20th and continuing on the next two nights, the Independent Film Channel is showing a three-part documentary by Richard LaGravenese and the late Ted Demme, called “A Decade Under the Influence: 70’s Films That Changed Everything.” Featuring movie clips and well-edited interviews with directors, producers, writers, and actors, the documentary traces the origins of a cultural revolution and the forces that made it both possible and necessary, and it has a satisfyingly booklike depth and heft. VH1, on the other hand, is showing a vacuous, supposedly “irreverent” series called “I Love the 70s,” with an hour devoted to each year, as a follow-up to its recent popular look back at the eighties. A compilation of clips from TV shows, movies, and ads, it features mostly low-calibre celebrities and comedians singing along with TV shows’ theme songs and merely stating, in more or less meaningless sound bites, their childhood feelings about the artifacts of that era. “I used to have vivid sexual fantasies about Shirley Jones,” someone says, as if we cared. The series’ tone is cool and deadpan, its heart hollow, its facts often off the mark. One of the most annoying sound-biters is the “media gadfly” Mo Rocca; media housefly is more like it. Except for a very few moments when someone calls a spade a spade—Anne Meara says of “Love, American Style,” “It was a piece of crap, that show,” which is both funnier and more interesting than Liz Phair’s claim that “that show turned me on”—there’s no sense of perspective or discrimination, no sense that anything was better or worse than anything else. (Of course, we all have our prejudices; I couldn’t help noticing that, the older the commentator, the more trenchant he or she seemed. I never would have guessed that I had so much in common with Twisted Sister’s Dee Snider.) Unlike VH1’s series “Behind the Music,” which charts the predictable but somehow always fascinating rise and fall and rebirth of rock bands and isn’t aimed at a particular age group, this series is intended for, and probably put together by, people who were of thumb-sucking age in the seventies; that must be why in the entire 1973 hour there is no mention of the Watergate hearings. Still, you wonder: Can a decade sue for misrepresentation? ♦

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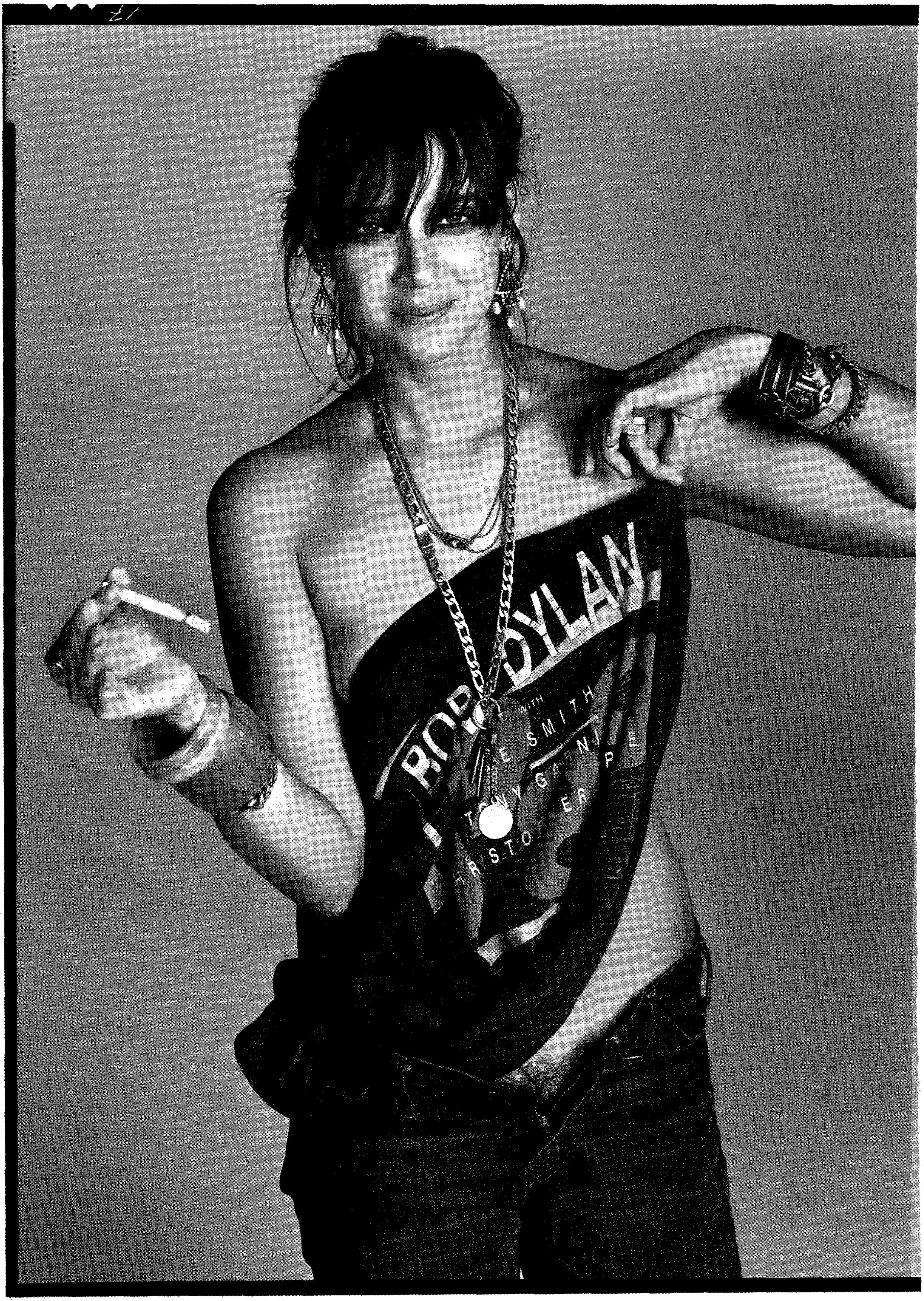
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POP MUSIC

WAYWARD GIRL

Cat Power demands attention, then resists it.

BY HILTON ALS

Near dusk one evening a few weeks ago, the thirty-one-year-old singer and songwriter Chan Marshall, who performs and records under the name Cat Power, made an appearance with her backup band at Castle Clinton, in Battery Park. Built in 1811, Castle Clinton is a squat red sandstone fort that has been an aquarium, an immigration center, and an opera house, and its history is almost as jumpy as the performance style of Chan Marshall herself. Jumpy and perverse, excruciating, and ultimately beautiful.

It is foolhardy to describe a Cat Power event as a concert. A concert involves the playing of music or songs in some kind of order, with short breaks and maybe a little patter in between. The form works: it allows the entertainer some distance, so that she can perform without becoming too involved in the audience's response. At Castle Clinton, Marshall reversed that order. The set lasted approximately an hour and ten minutes, during which time she talked to a friend's baby from the stage; asked no one in particular if the photographer Mark Borthwick was in the house; talked about her friends who had brought the baby; directed a fair amount of bemused antagonism toward a particularly ardent fan; asked someone offstage how many minutes were left in the set; sang a bit of rap from "The Teaches of Peaches," an album that was an underground hit last summer; smoked a couple of cigarettes; played with her hair; took her large sunglasses on and off; indulged in rambling confessions; and complained about the length of one tune from her current album, "You Are Free," before singing an abbreviated version of it.

Her backup band did not help matters. Collegiate and smug, her associates—Will Fratesi on drums, Matt Hartman on guitar, and Margaret White on violin, bass guitar, and keyboard—seemed to get off on the star's aura, but they treated her power ironically, so as not to appear to be what they are: sycophants disguised as musicians. Their smirking, knowing glances in Marshall's direction didn't lift her up, spiritually or otherwise, or induce her to act in a manner that the audience could consider generous.

The audience, for its part, was made up largely of young women and their admirers, who hooted or applauded or sat mesmerized as the delay tactics stretched to at least a third of the evening. They seemed to love Marshall as much for the drift of her mind as for the drift of her songs.

Born in Atlanta in 1972, Marshall had a peripatetic childhood, but she considers the South her home. Her father was a blues musician, her mother a hippie. Charlyn (later shortened to Chan and pronounced "Shawn") Marshall sang with a number of pickup bands in Georgia and elsewhere—"down there," as she has called it—before moving to New York, eleven years ago. In 1994, a friend invited her to open for Liz Phair. In 1996, she released her first long-playing album on Matador, "What Would the Community Think." This year's strange and powerful "You Are Free" is her fourth album for Matador, and her most fully realized work. In between, Marshall produced the extraordinary "The Covers Record" (2000), which features her versions of "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," "Sea of Love," and "Wild Is the Wind." She still does not have a manager.

On each new album, Marshall has more firmly established her haunting musical persona: that of a Southern belle in bluejeans, a trashed Faulkner heroine whose arias of disillusionment, hope, fantasy, bitterness, and understanding are played out in 4/4 time and in a dis-

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

Cat Power (Chan Marshall) in New York City, July 28, 2003.

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tinctly American syntax. In "Fool," a track on "You Are Free," she describes what Americanness feels like far from home: "Apartment in New York, London and Paris / Where will we rest / we're all livin' on top of it / it's all that we have / the USA is our daily bread / and no one is willing to share it."

In the decade since Marshall's début, the female indie singer-songwriters who have survived without benefit of heavy MTV rotation—P. J. Harvey, Tori Amos, Björk—have been European (Amos, an American, did not become widely known until she moved to England, in 1991), and their fan base remains primarily European. While their music is indebted to the American blues vernacular, it also borrows from classical and electronic music. Marshall's sound, which centers on her voice—wood-smoked and honey-basted, with Dixie-inflected vowels and consonants that trail off like half-forgotten thoughts—is a direct outgrowth of the blues, but not the blues as a declaration of anger and disaffection (as with Benjamin Smoke) or as stripped-down tempo overlaid with poetic fantasies (as with Patti Smith). Marshall doesn't want to speed up the blues—to make it into rock and roll or anything that it isn't. It's as if her soft, sometimes plaintive voice and her simple arrangements—a plodding piano or a gently strummed guitar, sometimes supported by backup vocals—were a version of the production values on all those OKeh records from the twenties. (Marshall's raw emotions are the scratches on the vinyl.) She's a white girl sucking the sound of the Delta down her throat. Think of the stark arrangement on Al Green's classic song "Simply Beautiful" and of Nico intoning "Deutschland Über Alles," and you'll have some idea of what Marshall is getting at in the recording studio.

Marshall is a storyteller, and she cares more about how she says something than about what she says. The lyrics of the songs on "You Are Free" are rudimentary—on the page. In "Good Woman," Marshall sings, "I want to be a good woman / and I want for you to be a good man / this is why I will be leaving / this is why I can't see you no more." How far is this from the 1927 song "Backwater Blues"? "Backwater blues done caused me to pack my things and go / 'Cause my house fell down and I can't live there no mo'." The intention in both lyrics is

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the same: a statement of fact trying to remain steady in the face of ambivalence.

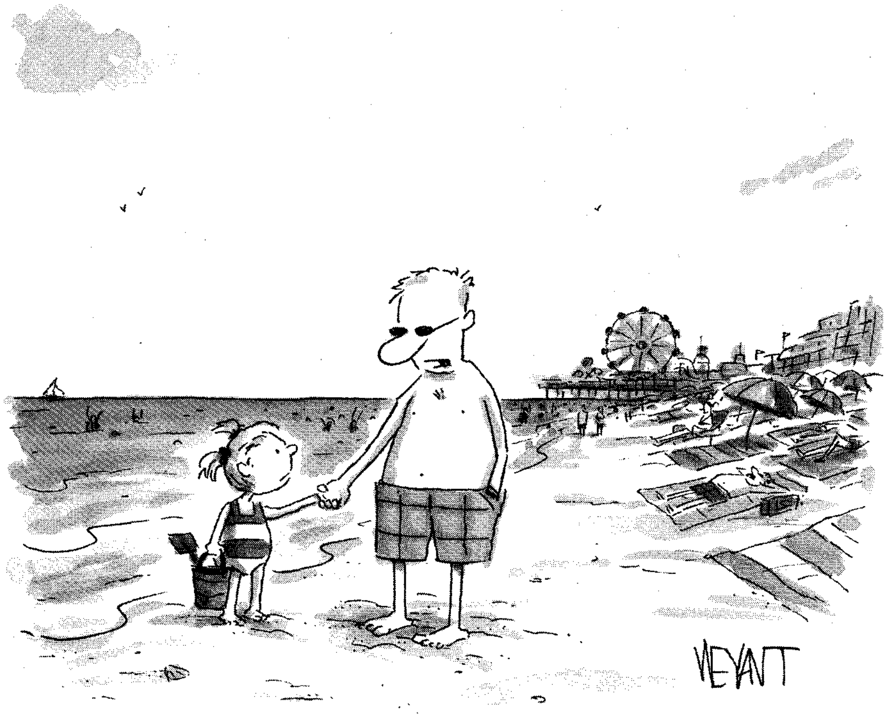
As a chronicler of wayward girls in the South, sexually battered but empowered by their sexuality just the same, Marshall finds narrative cohesion in the shards of her female characters' lives. In "Names," on "You Are Free," Marshall sings:

Her name was Naomi
beautiful round face so ashamed
she told me how to please a man
after school in the back of the bus
she was doin' it every day
she was 11 years old

Rendered in Marshall's slow, half-whispering voice, Michael Hurley's "Werewolf" becomes the soundtrack for a horror movie, as Marshall turns the threat of impending love into something as scary and fascinating as pornography. Backed by beautifully arranged strings and a guitar, she sings, "Oh, the werewolf come stepping along / he don't even break the branches / where he has gone . . . / and the werewolf was crying . . . / how I loved the man / as I teared off his clothes." This could be Naomi writing a letter from home.

Onstage at Castle Clinton, Marshall was alternately shy and demanding, a solipsist; that is to say, a star. Her triumphs were as engaging as her disasters. Her long, beautiful body perfectly complemented her long, beautiful hair. ("She cut her bangs!" one young female fan exclaimed after the show.) Dressed in jeans and a brown cotton shirt with green stripes, bangles clanking on her wrists, she was at play in the fields of androgyny, impersonating a lonesome cowboy who attracts attention by seeming to spurn it. Here was a girl—"white trash"—who had found her voice in inarticulateness, the American way of speaking, and made it a powerful form of communication. Marshall's stubborn refusal to be liked seemed to enact the frustration of many American women, who feel they have to be seen in order to be heard.

These various complications may, in the end, minimize Marshall's audience—and her gifts. But, despite herself, Marshall let her stardom and talent win out. At the close of her set, she grabbed the mike and walked up and down the center aisle like a preacher at a revival meeting, singing, cigarette in hand, Black Sabbath's "Black Sabbath." Watching her, you tumbled down a well of longing and hope. Marshall looked as if she had been painted *en plein air*, a fluid version of Liberty standing guard over the Harbor. Her voice in that song was the blues sound of trouble in mind everywhere. ♦



"No, sweetie, we don't go to the beach. We're from New Jersey—we go to the shore."

Costantino Nivola in Springs
and
Frederick Kiesler:
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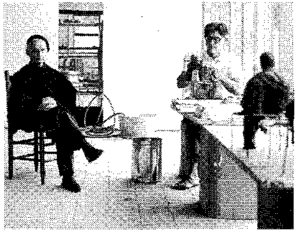

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Frederick Kiesler and Costantino Nivola in Nivola's East Hampton Studio, 1959. Photo: Hans Namuth, Courtesy Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. ©Hans Namuth Estate.

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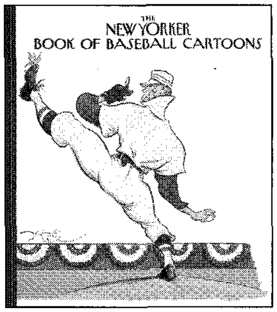

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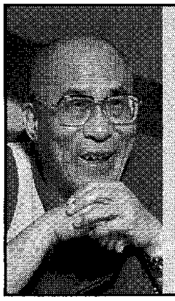

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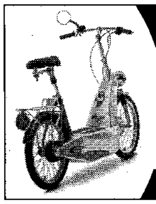

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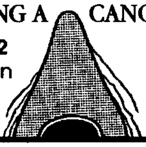

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

LIFE IN PICTURES

"American Splendor" and "Le Divorce."

BY ANTHONY LANE

This is a wild guess, but I suspect that the title of "American Splendor" is touched with irony. There are many qualities that one associates with Harvey Pekar, the hero of the movie, but "splendor" is not the first that leaps to mind. He is a creature of grimace and gloom, who works as a file clerk at a hospital in Cleveland. This gives him a promising backdrop for his hypochondria, and for his general state of cranky disrepair. "I have a problem with cleanliness," he admits, scratching his scalp as if to check that his head is still in place. As if that weren't bad enough, Harvey has one more problem: he is real.

"American Splendor" is directed by Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini, who have done a remarkable job, not least by refusing to confound us. The film's attention is divided between the actual Harvey, who is interviewed regularly throughout, and a Harvey who is played by Paul Giamatti; the same goes for Harvey's wife, Joyce, who provides a delicious role, at once sharp and spaced out, for Hope Davis. This is not a gnarled postmodern trick, not a formal inquiry into the slippage of identity; it is just the way things are, and the true-life Harvey accepts it shruggingly, as he does so much else. "The guy plays me, anyway," he tells us in voice-over. "He don't look anything like me, but whatever." Ah, the poise of the man: such good grace in so bad a mood.

Starting in the nineteen-sixties, Harvey collected records and comic books, both of them a trademark of the impassioned solitary. One day at a yard sale, he met Robert Crumb (incarnated here by James Urbaniak), and the rest, as they say, was mystery. Harvey proposed that his own existence—his Harveyhood, if you like, in all its rutted drabness, spiked with small desires and unexceptionable woes—was worthy of creative representation, and Crumb, whose art is nothing if not generous, saw that Harvey might have a point. And so a comic strip entitled "American Splendor" was born, with Crumb as the draftsman and Harvey supplying the words. On occasion, Crumb handed his role to somebody else. "Different artists also draw me all kindsa ways," Harvey says, like Henry VIII explaining that even Holbein had to take a break.

The movie makes beautiful play with this game. Some of the compositions are framed as though in the panel of a comic strip, crowned with titles ("Our story begins . . . ," or the courageously unarousing "Meanwhile in Delaware . . ."). Lovelier still is the sequence in which various actions from Harvey's life are transformed into pen and ink. He sits in a diner, a waitress pours him a cup of coffee, and, without any fuss, the tableau is briefly stilled into a work of art, with a thought bubble blooming from Harvey's brain—"I'm desperately lonely and horny as hell." In short, "American Splendor" does what few movies of late have bothered, or dared, to do: it registers the beat of ordinary lives. That it does so in tribute to a comic book is the most telling joke of all. This year, we have suffered a summer's worth of comic-book movies, all of them trying and failing to match the visual stringency of the drawn page, and none of them willing to curtail the planet-size ambitions of their superheroes, or to admit that the modest demands of a plain, unsuperlative hero can have a grandeur—dare one say, a splendor—of their own. I liked the split screens of "Hulk," but they shrivel beside the wit of a single

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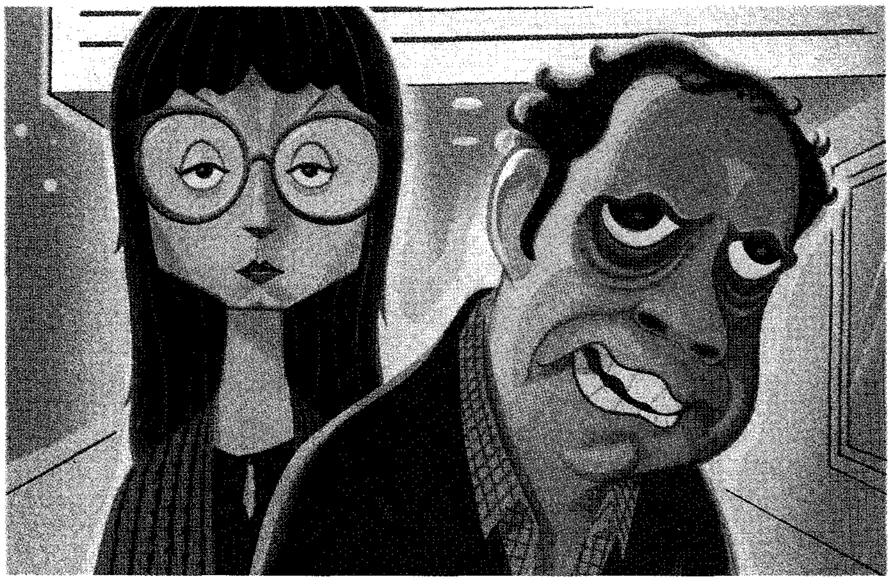
scene in "American Splendor," when Joyce, who has not yet met Harvey, arrives at a train station and stares around, seeing a selection of possible Harveys—cutouts, each sketched by a different hand—lounging in vacant seats.

When our man finds the nerve to approach her, he does so by sidling in from the edge of the frame, as wary as a hermit crab, with no establishing shot to tell us that he was even on the premises. Barely able to glance at Joyce, Harvey exclaims, "Look, before we get started with any of this you might as well know right off the bat that I had a vasectomy." What a charmer. Giamatti gets maximum value from this blend of diffidence and blurt; some of his lines could have been pinched from Samuel Beckett ("Now, there's a reliable disappointment," he says, peering in the mirror), and I decided in the end that I preferred Giamatti's wistful Harvey to the real thing. As for Harvey's friend Toby—an astounding personage, who thinks nothing of driving to Toledo to see "Revenge of the Nerds"—the actor who mimics him, Judah Friedlander, struck me as an improvement on the already startling original. These are strong days for documentary, and Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini could easily have made a purely factual picture about Harvey and company. Instead, they chose to upgrade their material—both to intensify it and to hold it at a discreet comic distance. That is the quiet triumph of "American Splendor": behind the playfulness, it cleaves to an oddly old-fashioned belief that a life, even a life as mangy as Mr. Pekar's, gains in depth and darkness when it is crosshatched with the imaginary. The nerd needs no revenge.



Hope Davis and Paul Giamatti as characters from the Harvey Pekar comic.

ERIC PALMA

By the smooth standards of earlier Merchant Ivory projects, "Le Divorce" is a halting affair. Adapted from Diane Johnson's novel, it recounts the shenanigans of Americans in Paris. Isabel (Kate Hudson) travels there to visit her sister Roxy (Naomi Watts), who has married a Frenchman called Charles-Henri (Melvil Poupaud) and is expecting their second child. The husband chooses this moment to fly the coop, although whether this is because of his dread of bourgeois existence or simply because he can't face two American blondes in his apartment at any one time is, for a while, left unclear. Isabel, meanwhile, makes the most of her stay by shopping exhaustively for lingerie and, thus armored, sliding into bed with Edgar (Thierry Lhermitte), who is—hold tight now—the fifty-five-year-old brother of the mother of her sister's about-to-be-ex. Does that count as incest, or intrigue, or good manners? Whatever the case, the movie tells us, it's just so *French*.

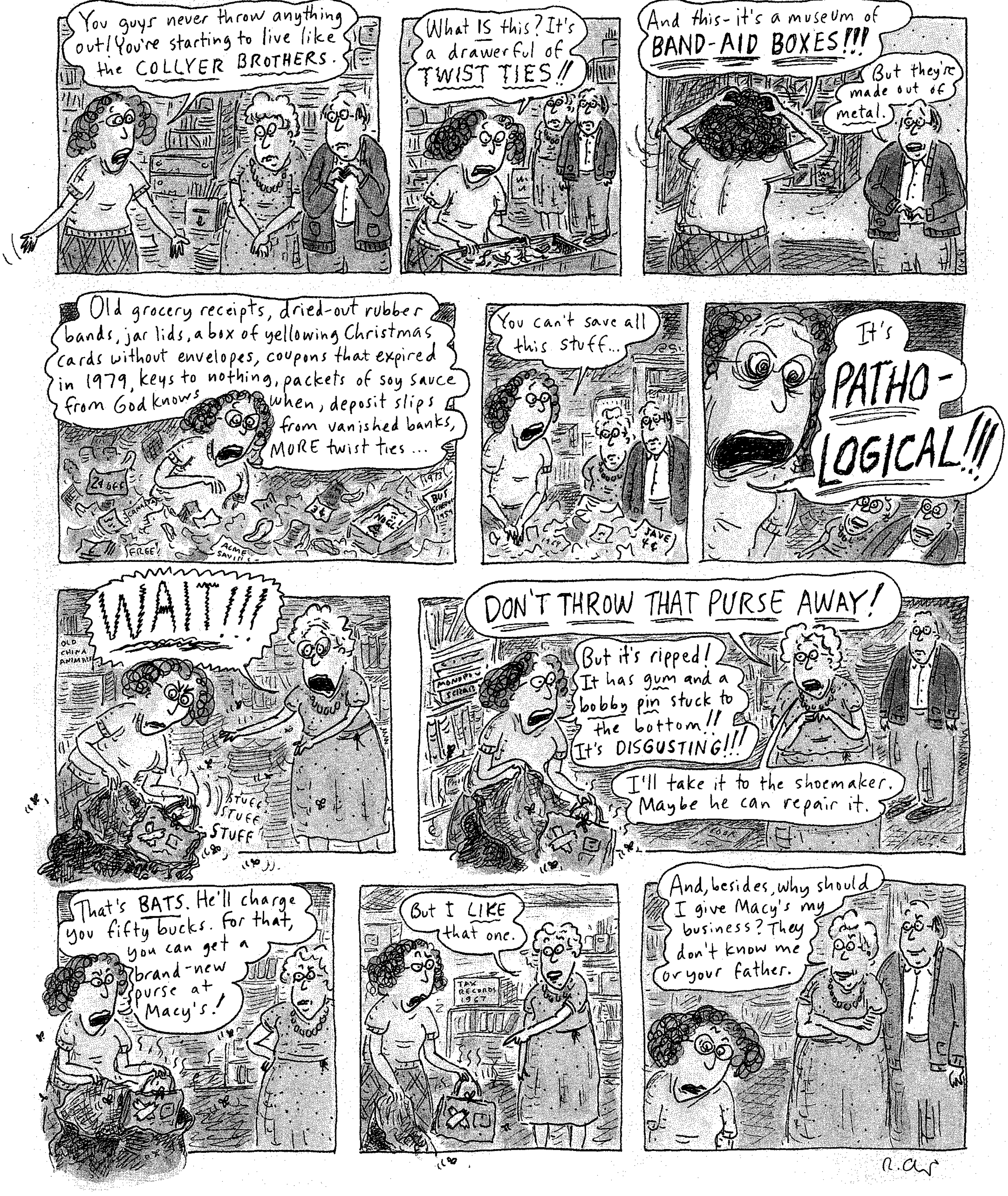
The director, James Ivory, and his trusty screenwriter, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, are such veterans of culture clash—having dished up more Henry James and E. M. Forster adaptations than is medically advisable—that the prospect of yet another rake-meets-ingénue setup should hardly have fazed them. And, to be fair, there is something refreshing in the directness with which Roxy squares up to her formidable mother-in-law (Leslie Caron, no less) over lunch and inquires, "Why are adultery and fornication treated as the greatest jokes on earth?" It's a loaded question, tamped down with primness, and you could use it to fire a spirited comedy, in which the sincerities of the New World thud into the rules of the European game. But that, regrettably, is not what we get.

What we get is a mess. We get a cast of embarrassing richness, mostly underused, including Stockard Channing, Sam Waterston, and Bebe Neuwirth, plus Glenn Close as something so terrifying with long charcoal-gray hair that I fought the urge to hide under my seat till she had blown over. We also get a number of trailing subplots; poor Matthew Modine plays a deranged American cuckold whose fate is dismissed in a feathery voice-over at the close, while entire scenes trundle past in which we learn more than we ever yearned to know about French divorce law. Worst of all is the business with the painting—a Georges de La Tour rip-off (or so it seems) that belongs to the sisters and their family. The penultimate sequence shows their little faces brimming with avidity and glee as the work comes up for auction and fares well. And I thought these were the good guys.

Merchant Ivory has, now and then, been scorned for a surfeit of tastefulness—for not daring enough. Well, "Le Divorce" dares to consider murder, abortion, custody battles, and attempted suicide, and by the end you wish it had settled for froth. The truth is that almost nobody, and certainly no nation, emerges well from this sour endeavor. The sole hero of the hour, as of so many Paris pictures, is Hermès, who supplied the blood-red Kelly bag that Isabel receives from her lover. (She even takes it to an evening concert—still a capital offense in France, I believe.) The director, too, is so enamored of this leatherware that, at the end, he shows it sailing over the roofs of the city—a touching homage to "The Red Balloon," only slightly deflated by the fact that, in my limited experience, handbags don't float. ♦

THE BACK PAGE BY ROZ CHAST

HOME ECONOMICS


You guys never throw anything out! You're starting to live like the COLLYER BROTHERS.
What IS this? It's a drawerful of TWIST TIES!!
And this - it's a museum of BAND-AID BOXES!!!
But they're made out of metal.
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WAIT!!!
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DON'T THROW THAT PURSE AWAY!
But it's ripped! It has gum and a bobby pin stuck to the bottom!! It's DISGUSTING!!!
MONOPOLY SCRABBLE
I'll take it to the shoemaker. Maybe he can repair it.
That's BATS. He'll charge you fifty bucks. For that, you can get a brand-new purse at Macy's!
But I LIKE that one.
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And, besides, why should I give Macy's my business? They don't know me or your father.

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